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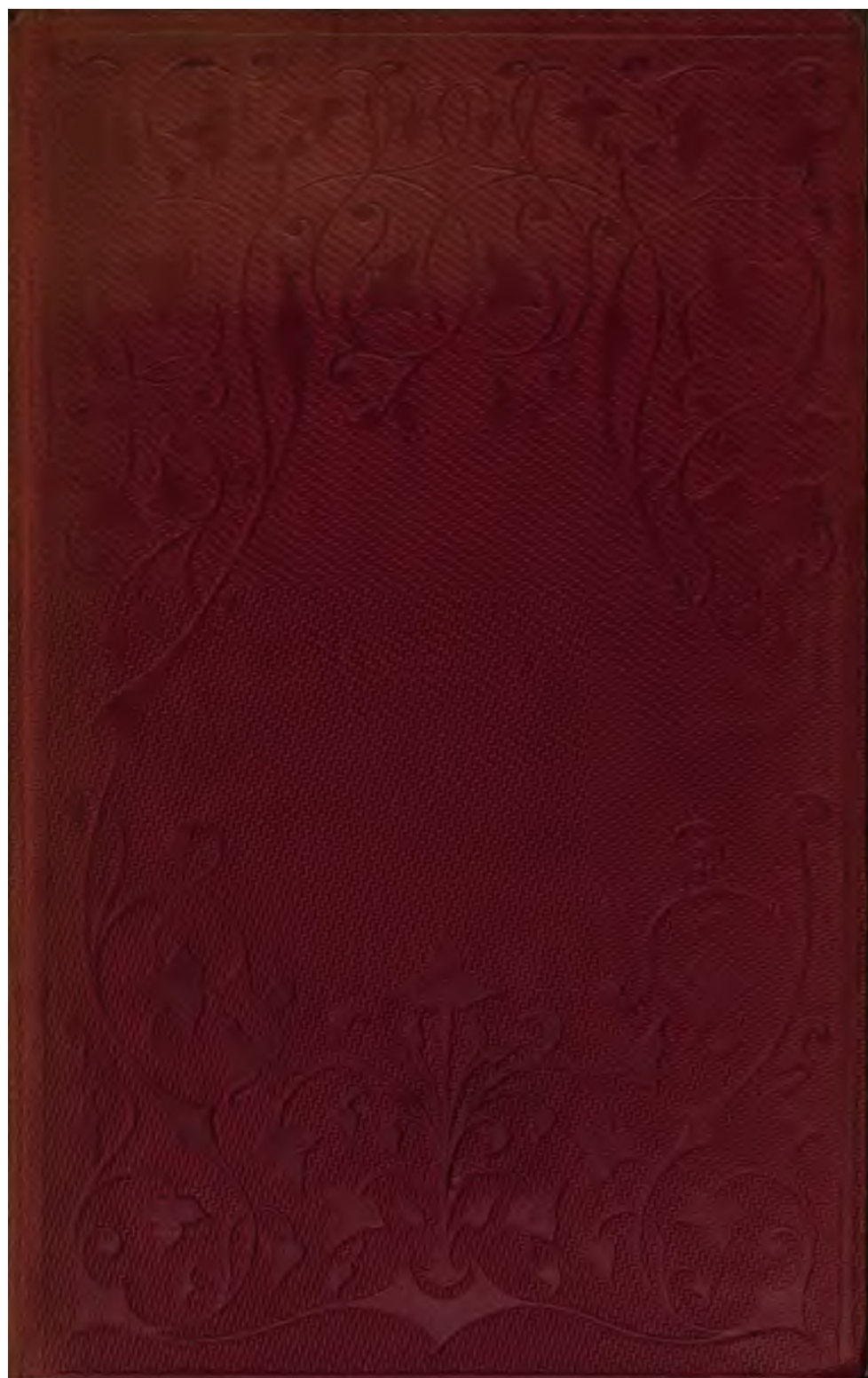
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MALVERN;
OR,
THE THREE MARRIAGES.
—
VOL. III.

MALVERN;

OR,

THE THREE MARRIAGES.

BY MRS. HUBBACK,

AUTHRESS OF

"THE WIFE'S SISTER," "MAY AND DECEMBER,"

&c., &c.

Oh Life! without thy chequered scene
Of right and wrong, of weal and woe,
Success and failure, could a ground
For magnanimity be found;
For Faith 'mid ruined hopes serene?
Or, whence could Virtue flow?

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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MALVERN.



CHAPTER I.

Fair would I hope, if hope I could,
If sure to be deceived,
There's comfort in a thought of good,
Tho' 'tis not quite believed—
For sweet is hope's wild warbled air,
But oh!—its echo is despair!

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

THE fierceness of the storm was gone, and the atmosphere was the brighter, clearer, fresher for the convulsions by which it had been shaken. Flora's serenity was returning, and she was just thinking of rising from the bank, unconscious how long she had been sitting there, when a footstep approaching rapidly, made her look

round, and in a moment Norman Grant was by her side.

“Miss Denys !” he exclaimed, “how happy I am to meet with you. I had no idea where you were gone, although I saw you pass the garden, and wished very much to ask leave to accompany you.”

“Thank you,” said she; “but it was my object to be alone.”

The sound of her voice immediately betrayed that she had been crying, and she was not surprised that it brought his quick eyes on her face with an earnest gaze. The traces of her agitation were still visible, and after looking at her for a little while with concern, he said very gently :

“I am afraid, Miss Denys, something has occurred to distress you. I would not be importunate ; perhaps you would rather now that I left you.”

“I am much obliged, but I am just going home,” replied Flora, trying to look quite calm.

“And may I have the great pleasure of walking with you?” said he, “or would it be more agreeable if I kept at a distance?”

“I think I have, perhaps, had as much solitude as is good for me,” returned Flora, forcing a smile, “so we may agree to walk together, if we are going the same way.”

“Miss Denys,” said he, in an anxious, almost agitated tone, “may I ask why you were so unkindly incredulous last night?”

She looked surprised, but waited for him to say more.

“About those foolish lines—foolish, perhaps, but sincere in what they said; not meant, certainly, to be treated as a joke for the public benefit.”

“I thought the whole affair a joke, and not a very wise one,” was her quiet answer; “I neither expected nor wished your sister’s fancies to be carried out.”

“And you really did not write those lines which I received? You say so, and of course I

am bound to believe you ; but it is a disappointment." He took the original paper out of his pocket as he spoke, glanced over it, and then, somewhat impatiently, tore it up into the minutest fragments, and scattered them in the air. She looked on quite composedly. Turning again to her, he said earnestly: " But, though mine were written under a delusion as to facts, there was no mistake as to feelings and sentiments. Do not condemn them altogether."

" So far as I remember their expressions," said she, in the same quiet, reserved tone, " I should say they were good enough for the occasion. They seemed to contain such ordinary compliments as one expects in verses of the kind, and were no disgrace, as a *jeu d'esprit*, to your powers of composition. Now, I think we have said enough on the topic. If your author's vanity is not satisfied, I can do no more for you. You must go to somebody else," softening into a slight smile.

" It is not my vanity as an author, which is

in the least concerned, Miss Denys," was his grave reply ; " it is my feelings, as a man. They were no vain compliments, no idle appeal. When I asked for a hearing, it was because my happiness depended on it, and the reason why I had not complied originally with Louisa's request was, that I was too sincere to jest on my admiration for you. Had I been less in earnest, I might have praised you in verses for the public ear, but *that* I could not bring myself to do. Now I will address you in plain and sober prose. May I speak ?"

She turned to him a calm, grave, pale face, not very encouraging in its expression, which seemed near akin to such a thought as " Speak, and have done with it ;" and leaning against the gate which they had just reached, she implied rather by look and gesture, than by word spoken, that he would be listened to.

She was not unprepared for what was to follow ; Mr. Boyle's remarks of that morning had opened her eyes to the fact that Norman

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meant something more than idle admiration, and she thought it would be as well to take the earliest opportunity of giving him plainly to understand, that her views did not at all coincide with Louisa's or Mr. Boyle's.

The quiet but dignified calm of her manner, as unlike the flutter and tremor of gratified vanity, as it was different from what he would have expected bashful, maidenly affection to prompt, somewhat discouraged him; and although, in general, not much troubled with modesty, he was becoming every moment more shy of speaking, and more sensible of the shortness of their acquaintance, and the apparent presumption of his hopes. But he was in for it now, and must go on as well as he could, endeavouring by humility and devoted affection, to win what he might have failed to obtain by livelier qualifications.

“Miss Denys, I hope you will believe my sincerity now, when I say I am deeply, devotedly in love with you. Your beauty, your charms of

mind, have all joined to captivate me entirely ; and, although I came down here with feelings rather prejudiced against Miss Denys the heiress, my heart has been completely won, my prejudices subdued, my pride prostrated, by Miss Denys the charming, lovely, amiable and accomplished woman."

"Your good opinion, Mr. Grant, is a compliment for which I am obliged. The shortness of our acquaintance, perhaps, may make it seem not unreasonable to suggest, that it is a little precipitate ; and, whilst I do not doubt your present sincerity, I hope you will believe me, when I say my thanks for your favourable judgment, are all I can return."

"I did not flatter myself," exclaimed he, eagerly, thinking she was going to move on, "not for one moment, at least, perhaps only for one, that you could think of me in the way I do of you ; that you could entertain one twenty-thousandth part of the regard I feel for you. I knew that must be out of the question. The shortness of

our acquaintance must, indeed, be an effectual barrier to that ; you need not remind me of it, but it has been no impediment to my attachment ; seeing you every day so constantly, in all the unreserved intimacy of private life, knowing you through my sister's praises, through the goodwill and friendship of every one worth caring for at Malvern, a week has been more than enough to create an attachment which I do not believe years could deepen or strengthen. No, Miss Denys, I love you with my whole heart, and time may prove my constancy, but cannot increase my love."

"I am sorry to hear it," said she, with even greater gravity. "It is quite out of my power to say anything else."

She resolutely walked on. Norman kept close to her side.

"But will it always be so, Miss Denys?" said he earnestly.

"Always ; as far as one can venture to answer for human feelings, I should say, for me to love you is quite impossible."

“Impossible ! Have you, then, so decided an objection to me ? Why—is it my temper—my morals—my disposition—my steadiness ? Do you doubt my disinterestedness, or my constancy ?”

“I have given none of these things a thought, as not concerning me. That is,” added she, correcting herself, “had I doubted your principles, do you suppose I should have allowed your society, as I have done ? I wish to think well of you, Mr. Grant ; I have no reason to do otherwise, except for the hastiness of your present declaration, which may well make me doubt your judgment ; but, without finding any fault with you, let it suffice to say, that I cannot return your good opinion.”

“Tell me one thing, if I may venture,” cried he, with eagerness. “Do I ask in vain, because your hand is already engaged ? One word to that effect, would prevent my annoying you with hopes or protestations. Avowedly, I know it is not ; but there might be a private engagement, of which my sister knows nothing. I do not

mean to offend," continued he, anxiously, seeing her heightened colour; "I do not mean to imply—Heaven forbid!—anything in the slightest degree—" he did not like to say 'improper,' and could not find a word less harsh; so he went on, "I did not ask your mother or your uncle; perhaps, if I had, they might have answered me differently from Louisa. But, in one word, is there a reason I may not ask to know?"

Flora found the length of Mr. Grant's speeches a singular advantage, during this dialogue; they gave her time to collect her ideas, and prevented her committing herself, by any hasty avowal, or awkward acknowledgment.

She answered his question, by saying, simply, that it was true she had no engagement; "but," added she, "neither do I intend to form any. I have no present thoughts of marrying, so far as I can venture to foresee; nothing is less likely. One never can answer for time to come; but my plans are, so soon as I am of age, to settle on my own property, or as near it as I can get

a house, and endeavour to fill the duties of a landholder amongst tenants who, I fear, have been only too much neglected during my minority. All my thoughts, henceforth, I shall devote to study, in preparation for this responsible situation, endeavouring to cram into this foolish head as many good ideas and rational principles, as can be accumulated in such a sieve as my brain is ; and if you, Mr. Grant, can tell me of any books which will give me a general idea of right and wrong, and common sense, and the English law, I should be really much obliged to you."

Such a very abrupt and unexpected turn to a discourse of a nature so important to him, took Mr. Grant not a little by surprise. The calm way in which she seemed to consider the matter of love settled, and entirely done with, made it difficult for him to begin again. He pulled his bushy whiskers with a thoughtful air, and doubted what to reply ; but his time for answering was short ; they had already regained the road ; and,

relentlessly hurrying on, Flora entered the house, and secluded herself once more in her mother's company.

Norman and Louisa rode out without companions that afternoon, Mrs. Denys having sent her compliments to Mr. Grant, and she and her daughter were going together for a drive.

Louisa was a very consolatory companion to her brother ; she encouraged him to perseverance, treated Flora's plans as a joke, and assured him that romantic girls with fortunes, were always forming visionary ideas of the sort. Her having assigned no reason, except simple indifference, for refusing him, was strongly in his favour. A week was, perhaps, too short a time for an heiress to be able to make up her mind ; he must persevere, if he intended to do any good ; a little steady and persevering devotion would have great effect, and she trusted much to his ready wit, and captivating manner. Norman was rather inclined to complain of the trick which had been put upon him, about that

“stupid acrostic,” as he now scrupled not to call it. He half suspected Mr. Clarke to be the author. He remembered how odd he had been in the evening, and the sarcasm with which he had received it.

Louisa, who knew more of the verses than he imagined, quietly said, she did not think it signified ; it had led to an explanation, and that was an advantage. Now that the first idea of his wishes was given, she hoped Flora would soon learn to see them in a more favourable light ; she should not wonder if great progress were made even before next Thursday, when she meant to leave him.

It happened, the following day, when Mrs. Denys’ carriage came round to the door, that lady complained of a headache, which made her unwilling to go out ; and at first, Flora suggested remaining at home with her ; but to this her mother would not agree ; she was sure Flora was looking pale, and if she did not ride, she ought to drive. So it was settled, that Mrs.

Newton should be asked to accompany her. It was a long time since that lady had been out beyond a walk ; and, as Mr. Newton wished her to have the change, as much as Flora desired her company, it was arranged according to Mrs. Denys' suggestion. It was just such an opportunity as Flora wanted ; of all things, she needed a confidential conversation with Mrs. Newton. The morning had been very unpleasant, and her spirits were much disturbed.

"I am sure you must have seen," said she, as soon as they were fairly set off, "how oddly we all went on last night. Did you not find out there was something the matter?"

"Certainly, I could see that things were not exactly on their usual pleasant footing. I guessed a good deal, from what I saw," replied Mrs. Newton.

"Oh ! you never could have guessed half what has happened," cried Flora, impetuously, "nor how disagreeable some people can contrive to make themselves. It was bad and awkward

last night ; it is twenty times worse to-day. I will tell you all."

"Take care what you say, Miss Denys. Do not tell me anything I ought not to know."

"No, no ; but now listen. You, perhaps, will not be surprised, after all those nonsense verses and stuff, to hear that Mr. Grant took it into his head to propose to me ; and, still less, that I refused him immediately."

"I do not think it is fair to tell such things," remonstrated Mrs. Newton.

"If, like a rational man, he would have taken no for an answer, I would never have repeated his folly. I assure you, I scorn the littleness and meanness of boasting of a proposal, as much as you can do. But now, do listen, for I want advice ; and my dear mamma is not strong enough, and much too indulgent to me, to be worried. You will not mind telling me if I have done wrong, will you ?"

"I will do the best I can, certainly."

"Thank you ; well, I told Mr. Grant I did

not care for him, very civilly, I believe ; but, really, a week's acquaintance is not enough for me to form an attachment in. I am not so easily satisfied as his sister, by whose conduct and opinions, perhaps, he judged me. He was very earnest, and eloquent, and made some pretty speeches ; I am not quite sure whether they were all sincere ; oratorical flourishes are in his line, you know ; and when I remembered my reputed fortune, I rather hardened my heart to his affection ; besides, after all, I had another reason, Mrs. Newton. I compared him with some one else, and found him very deficient indeed. But I assure you, I tried to be courteous, and not express my suspicions, and innocently thought the matter settled. No such thing. What a goose he is !”

“ You are rather hard upon your admirers, if their constancy is not to be placed on the credit side of their account, Miss Denys. I am sorry for Mr. Grant.”

“ Well, well, I cannot think much of a pas-

sion of a week, though, to do him justice, it did come on with decent graduation. But now comes the worst part. Yesterday evening, I was trying to behave as well as I could, neither kind enough to be supposed penitent, nor cold enough to be demonstrative, my great object being to prevent a scene, or a great *fracas*; and I thought we got on very well. Did you notice?"

"I observed you were somewhat stiff and stately in manner, that Miss Grant was fidgetty, her brother embarrassed and silent, and Mr. Boyle unusually animated."

"Added to which," said Flora, "Mr. Clarke was abstracted, gazing pensively at the Miss Cardens, and Annie herself as still and mute as a statue, and the whole makes a pleasant picture. Well, this morning, I had an interview with Louisa Grant, from which it appears that, on the plea of my being supposed not to know my own mind, Mr. Grant intends to continue his efforts to please me, hoping, like some knight-errant, or famous cavalier of old, to soften

my obdurate indifference, and win me, after all, for his bride. To all this I responded, that the thing was impossible. Mr. Grant was a very good sort of person, no doubt; but if he went on in that way, he would stand a fair chance of converting my indifference into aversion, and nothing else. Was I wrong to say so?"

"Quite right to refuse, if you did not love him."

"Well, Louisa said it was a shame; I had surely encouraged him, which I denied. Then she coaxed and flattered; told me her brother would be a baronet, perhaps—possibly a peer; how he loved me; how good he was, and all that—all to no purpose; I hate baronets, and don't care for peers, and told her, if I would not marry a man without a title, I certainly would not marry him because he had one; and she laughed unpleasantly, and said I was a dear romantic girl, quite right, however, and so forth. Then she went on some time in the same style, and then she made me angry."

Flora paused, coloured, looked down, and played with the handle of her parasol.

"That was rather a pity," observed Mrs. Newton. "She could not have been worth it."

"Well, I think I will tell you how she affronted me ; she suggested, that the reason I refused her brother, was because I liked—preferred—loved another, who did not care for me ! I told her she had no right to say so ; she begged my pardon, said—oh ! Mrs. Newton—she said she was not the only person who had seen, noticed, commented on, my apparent partiality for—for you know—for Astley !"

The deepest crimson dyed Flora's face, as she brought out the words.

"That was ungenerous of her," observed her friend, pitying the poor girl's confusion. "She ought not to have tried to influence you so. She could not, surely, wish you to accept her brother, either, if she thought that true. What could she mean ?"

"Is it true?" exclaimed Flora, eagerly,

choking down a struggling sob ; “ have people said, or thought that of me ? Has my manner conveyed it ? Tell me.”

“ Your manners, my dear, had so much of the old familiar feeling of your childhood, you treated him so much as a real, instead of a make-believe cousin, that, whatever the result may be, people will most probably say, ‘ I always thought so,’ and will believe it was just what they always expected.”

“ And do you know what the result is—that he is going to marry a lady in London,” said Flora, attempting a smile, and ending in gushing tears.

“ I should doubt that very much,” calmly observed Mrs. Newton ; “ nothing short of the very most conclusive evidence would convince me there was no mistake in that report.”

Flora squeezed her friend’s hand very forcibly, and presently recovered her composure enough to go on.

“ Louisa told me what I had heard before,

that when Mr. Boyle inquired what his nephew's intentions were, and what he was staying here for, he expressly denied all attachment to me before her."

She could not get on very well, her voice being often interrupted by her feelings.

"Then Mr. Boyle made him go away," continued she, "which he did at once."

"Mr. Boyle did not make him go away, my dear; your uncle wanted him at home in a hurry," said Mrs. Newton; "I know that, and also, that it was some business, law-business, with which Mr. Allen was connected. I do not know of what nature."

Flora paused and considered. "He did not tell you he was going to be married?"

"Most certainly not. He spoke of his future life as uncertain; depending upon the success of the business in which he was about to engage; and from what he said, I conjectured it was connected with money. But he told me things which convinced me that a marriage in

London was about the last thing which he would contemplate."

"Yet they tell me positively that he is paying his addresses to a young lady—a Miss Jones—with a very large fortune. I saw a letter from her father."

"I strongly recommend you to disbelieve it, until it is proved," persisted Mrs. Newton.

"But this is not all, dear Mrs. Newton—there is worse than this. Old Mr. Boyle came after this, and talked to me again. He told me, if I would marry Mr. Grant, he would give Astley, at once, a large sum of money, enough, perhaps, to clear him from all his difficulties, and prevent his sacrificing himself to this young lady's fortune. But if I would not, he should, instead of that, think it his duty to compensate to his future brother-in-law for his disappointment, of which he considered himself partly the cause; he should adopt him as his heir, and leave his whole fortune, eventually, between him and Louisa."

“To which I have no doubt but you made answer, ‘Do so;’ I am certain Astley Boyle would scorn the money bought by your sacrifice, and would far rather work for his bread than owe a fortune to such means. But what do you mean by difficulties? Is he embarrassed?”

“They say he is; but that I can hardly believe. It is all strange, contradicting all former experience! But I did answer something as you said; I refused, of course. But Mr. Boyle said, if he renounced his nephew, he should think himself called on to justify the step by letting those concerned know his reasons for abandoning him. He had proofs in his hands, which would testify to his baseness, to his habits of gaming, and other crimes; in fact, that it was in my power at once and entirely to save his character, or to suffer it to be ruined completely. On the spot, I still treated his offers with scorn; but he would not listen to my refusal; told me to think of it for a week, until he leaves England, and to consider that for that

time Astley's fate was in my hands ; and then he left me. And oh ! Mrs. Newton, what shall I do ?”

“ You do not really hesitate, my dear ?”

“ Indeed I do. The idea of marrying without loving is so terrible and miserable, that I cannot bear to imagine it ; but then, Norman Grant is pleasant, amiable, loves me—I might get to like him—we might manage to get on together ; and to save Astley—to prevent exposure and disgrace to him, I think I would bear misery even—and after all, is it not selfish to mind about my happiness ?”

“ Yes, of course it would be, my dear, if your happiness were what you consulted, it would be wrong and selfish ; but there are other rules to guide us. First settle would it be right to promise your hand to a man you do not love, for any earthly motive : to engage to love, honour, and obey one of whom you know so very little. And be quite honest with yourself, I do not ask you to be explicit to me ; is there no deeper reason

why you should not pledge your faith ? Even if you wished to give him your heart, have you still one to bestow ? is not that the source of your indifference ? Just answer this to yourself—put all consequences out of your head, and only try to see what you feel to be purely, simply right. Honest, sincere, high minded, I am sure you wish to be. You cannot hesitate !”

“No, I will not hesitate ; but the consequences, Mrs. Newton !” said she, faintly.

“Depend upon it, no consequences can be so bad, as a deviation from the plain path of duty. You are not responsible for Astley’s failings, nor for his uncle’s harshness ; do your duty, and if it does not make you perfectly happy now, believe, at least, that it will cause you less regret hereafter.”

“I suppose so—that is what you call Faith.”

“I shall say to you, as I said to Astley himself, the last time we talked together, ‘Trust and go forward !’ he said he would take it as his motto.”

"You said that to him ! and he told me to trust too ; to trust him whatever others said of or against him ; what an entangled, intricate, misty clue it seems," said Flora, thoughtfully.

"Then you resolve to do right bravely, and abide the consequences ; giving up all wild fancies about generosity and self-sacrifice, and determining to bear sorrow if it come ! To be just before you are generous—just to Mr. Grant—to Astley—to yourself !"

"Yes ; I will try and be brave, if I cannot be happy."

"Well, then, let us look these consequences in the face fairly. Suppose the accusations against him true, and that there really are things to reveal, would it not be better that they should be made known, if that may check him in doing wrong ; and then Mr. Boyle may forgive him after all, if he shows penitence and a wish to reform ; the revelation possibly may do good and not harm, as you imagine ; at least, you could not blame yourself for the result, as you

would most assuredly do, if, through your concessions, and his uncle's assistance, he were encouraged by present impunity to go on and do worse."

"Then you do really believe he has done something wrong?" said Flora, half vexed.

"No more than I do that he is going to be married; I was only looking at the worst side. There is another, and, to my mind, much more probable one, namely, that the whole of these circumstances are a delusion, a fiction, a mistake, and that time will show this to be the case. Then think what your pain and grief would be, if you had yielded to temptation, and reaped only vanity and disappointment. My dear, the man who can tempt you to such conduct, whether he himself believes what he asserts or not, can never be a safe counsellor. Do not listen; do not tamper with your conscience; walk on straight to your own duty, and leave the results to be decided by a Higher Power."

Flora leant back in the carriage, and drew

her veil across her face for some minutes. She was trying to stifle the sobs which would choke her voice; the struggle was hard, but it was successful, and after a while she sat up again in a calmer mood.

Mrs. Newton was reflecting. Although she had no real doubt but that Mr. Boyle was either wilfully or ignorantly misleading Flora, she yet did not on the whole think it advisable to enforce this opinion more strongly on her companion than was useful to prevent her taking some desperate step; it was better she should brace her mind to bear even the worst of her anticipations, than be unprepared for any probable disappointment. She resolved to say no more of her own convictions, trusting that a short suspense would be followed by a happy explanation in which past sorrow might be forgotten.

“ Ah, Mrs. Newton ! how right you were when you warned me, that what I was listening for so eagerly might prove a funeral dirge,” said Flora, recurring to their conversation of two days before.

"This is, indeed, the dirge of all happiness to me."

"I should hope not, my dear, even supposing old Mr. Boyle's story quite correct. I trust your mind and heart are under better control than to entertain such an idea. The disappointment of our fond expectations, when we find those we have loved and confided in, do not deserve our confidence, or do not care for our feelings, is, I well know, extremely bitter; but when such knowledge is brought home to us by means for which we are not responsible, it is a lesson set us to learn, which will do us good, and not harm. Sorrow which comes on us, not through our own fault, may be borne trustfully, patiently, lovingly; with the perfect confidence that it is, that it must be right for us, although we do not see why."

Flora sighed, and faintly answered, "I will try."

Mrs. Newton did not expect more of a girl of twenty, writhing under a first disappointment in love. She went on talking; she spoke of

the great end and object of life ; of the duties which wealth entails ; of the affection her mother bore her, and of the struggles against disappointment and depression which she knew Flora would make for her sake. She spoke of the heroism which daily life requires, the calm, decided self-sacrifice, the resolute endeavour to make others happy ; the means to obtain the necessary strength, and the peace which victory in such a conflict must leave behind.

Life gained a new importance, in Flora's mind, as she listened and reflected. But hers was an unsteady glimpse ; and her feelings gave their changing colours to her views. She was like a child gazing through panes of various coloured glass ; and she could hardly believe that it was only the medium through which she saw it, that differed, not the landscape at which she looked.

Still, she began to comprehend that earnest action for the good of others, and not silent brooding over her own sorrows, would be, in every respect, the most likely to secure her future

peace, even if she could not expect present enjoyment.

With many thanks for Mrs. Newton's kindness and patience, she left her ; and during the rest of the afternoon, a keener observer than her mother would hardly have discovered that she was more pensive or low-spirited than usual.

CHAPTER II.

Yet though forbidden by despair
The dream of happier hours—
As once I wreathed thy sunny hair
With Summer's brightest flow'rs,
I'll follow still, with love unseen,
Thy smile, thy voice's tone ;
My heart shall own no other queen,
But worship thee alone.

MR. Clarke was walking leisurely along the road, under the Abbey gateway, his eyes fixed on the ground, and his heart on Annie Carden, when he was arrested by a hand upon his shoulder, and a voice which said, " A pretty fellow you are, for cutting an old friend."

" Hamilton ! why old fellow when did you come back ? I am glad to see you, with all my heart !"

"Thank you ; I hope then you have more heart than eyes, or my welcome is but a scanty one ! How goes all in Malvern ?"

" *Tanto bene, tanto male* ; a queer world we live in. Don't trust it, Hamilton."

"What's the matter ? Eh !" turning to walk with him ; and the two friends sauntered up the hill towards one of the benches on the open green-sward.

"I have nothing to tell you which will please you," said Mr. Clarke.

"I do not desire you to please me, as Jacques says, I desire to know how matters go on."

"And I shall answer like him—'A miserable world.' Not that there has been anything unusual here—much what one might expect."

"I expected to find you rational—communicative and a good fellow. I hope then I shall find it so."

"Well, I would communicate, if I could find words to do so, all I have to tell. Let me see. There is no great change since our last reports.

Amusements have come well to hand, and are eagerly bought up on somewhat extravagant terms; but turn out mostly rather light and poor in quality. Gossip and scandal have been pretty liberally supplied, and are much sought after by certain speculators in the market. Samples of sense and good nature have been produced, which promise fair, but the delivery has been scanty, and the exchange unremunerative. There has also been a little attempted in the way of hearts and affections; but though the bidders offered high prices, the holders of the best articles were rather unwilling to come to terms, and stood out stiffly for advanced rates. On the whole, the business of the week has been dull and disappointing to dealers and speculators alike."

"Whew!" said Hamilton, "I wonder what I am to understand by this tirade, Clarke. Could you not bring yourself to speak plain sense, and wholesome English for once?"

"And what's the use of all your learning, sciences, and various profound investigations,

my dear Hamilton, and you cannot tell what is the matter with me ?”

“I have not the least idea, unless you are in love.”

“Ah ! I knew your penetration would lead you to the truth, and spare my blushes !”

“Well, and pray why don’t you marry, Clarke ?” said Hamilton, bluntly.

“Nay, why don’t you, if it comes to that, Hamilton ?—you are older than I am.”

“Because I never have been in love, as you call it, that I know of. If I were, I would marry directly.”

“Not without the lady’s consent and approbation, I presume,” observed Clarke, very meekly. “If you could tell me how to obtain that, I should rather thank you.”

“What, is that it ? The fair Creole will have none of you,” said Hamilton, with surprise.

“Be so good as to speak of Miss Carden in respectful terms, Hamilton,” said his companion, in his natural voice.

“Certainly, I respect her very much—more especially for refusing you !”

“For my own part,” observed Clarke, “I must say that strikes me as her least merit ; but then, I am modest.”

“It proves her disinterested,” said Hamilton.

“I knew her too well to require such a proof, and should rather have excused it.”

“I am sorry for you, too, my dear fellow ; you did not want so much taking down as most people ; and she would have made you a nice wife.”

“I am not without hopes that she may still do so,” replied Clarke, quietly.

“What ! do you mean to ask again ?—that is pluck ! I could not do that for any woman in England.”

“Fortunately, I am infinitely your superior in humility, courage, and generosity.”

“Generosity !” replied Hamilton, drawing imaginary circles in the air with his stick ;

“truly generous, in trying to get your own way. I wish Miss Carden could hear you.” !

“ I wish she could, with all my heart ; I never can get enough of her society. By the bye, in that case, Hamilton, I rather think I should not devote my eloquence and wit to your use. But now, do tell me what you would have a poor fellow do in such indigent circumstances. I worked hard to gain her good opinion in an honest way ; now I must be content to beg for it, as other means have failed.”

“ Well, I say, I could not. I should run away at once.”

“ There’s an old song, Hamilton, to this effect :

‘ The man from battle runs away
Would make a sorry lover.’

and though even staying here, I am, at the best but a sorry lover, after all ; still, matters might be worse. I do not know anything else to do, except go off to Circassia, and help fight against the Russians.”

“ And drown his love in war’s loud roar,
Nor think of Annie Carden more.”

said Mr. Hamilton, half-mockingly ; “ every one to his taste, however. I dare say she is worth it !”

“ I dare say she is, you heretic. But now, in sober earnest, had I received a decisive ‘ No,’ I do not think I should have gone on ; but it was a hesitating, uncertain, trembling ‘ No,’ coming as much from innocent modesty, as any other feeling. Do you know, she never suspected that I loved her till I told her so.”

“ Well, that’s what I like !” exclaimed Hamilton. “ I wish I had thought of making love to her first ; I might have been more successful. Don’t you think I should ?”

“ Not the slightest chance, my good fellow. So, as I must stay here for the present, she is so good as to bear with me still, and—well, never mind the sequel.”

“ And now, who are the others ? You inti-

mated that more than one such adventure had occurred—who is it?”

“Well the next is a more promising affair: the fair Louisa Grant weds—who do you think? *je vous le donne en vingt, je vous le donne en cent*—guess, will you?”

“Old Mr. Boyle, I suppose—nobody else would be blockhead enough to take her.”

“Some witch told you that, Hamilton. Yes! they are to be wedded on Thursday, if the fates are propitious—here, from this very house; so we shall all enjoy the fun and wedding-cake.”

“I wish her joy of her prize, O!” replied Hamilton, and went on humming a popular Scotch tune.

“When you leave off that melody, I will tell you the rest,” observed Clarke.

“Miss Denys and Astley Boyle, of course; I knew long ago he was in love with her, somewhat savagely and desperately.”

“Astley Boyle is not to the fore,” replied Clarke. “He went, you know, before you, but

being less like a bad halfpenny, has not yet turned up."

"Why, where is he, and what is he doing?"

"He is gone, like a certain old woman of my nursery acquaintance, to sweep cobwebs out of the sky, and when he has done, he promises to come back here; probably, that will be by-and-bye, like the said old woman."

"And is Flora the fair left in 'anxious love and hopeless fear' all this time? or is she aware that these cobwebs form impediments to their mutual happiness?"

"Flora the fair, or, as Mr. Grant poetically designates her, the White Lily, has not, until recently, shown either love or fear. She half put me in a rage by allowing that fellow Grant to be ever at her elbow; but the tide has turned now: she looks pale, and sits silent, turns the cold shoulder to her new lover, and has reduced him to a state closely resembling an aërated lemonade bottle. He nearly exploded at me, because he thought I had put my fingers in his

dish. I had some difficulty in convincing him of his mistake ; however, we shook hands over it at last, and he told me his ill-luck with Miss Denys. I could have found in my heart to have pitied him, from sympathy and fellow-feeling, but for that intriguing sister of his, whom I dislike more than I do most women."

"I used to think that having a bad sister must be rather a reason for pitying a fellow than not," said Hamilton. "I don't know this Grant ; what sort of man is he?"

"Ah ! he was not here till after you and young Boyle went away. He is well enough—the sort of man women like—dark eyes, large whiskers, a well-made coat, and a fluent tongue, and a pair of the neatest lady's horses which I have seen for a long time, though not quite equal to my 'Miranda.' He is bent on marrying Miss Denys, and his sister aids and abets him. I told him at last, in confidence, that I thought he was throwing away his abilities in a vain pursuit, in trying to open an empty casket,

or to take possession of pre-occupied ground ; that there were masked batteries, and mines, and rifle-rangers, and all sorts of unknown dangers in the way, and that he had better leave off, while he was well. I almost thought the man really loved her, he was so disturbed at my intelligence."

"I wonder you cannot forbear meddling, Clarke ; I should have thought you knew better than to interfere in any such case. Miss Denys could refuse him for herself, I should suppose."

"Don't you pretend to judge of what you do not understand. I know more than you of these matters, and if you set yourself up for a censor, I shall leave you in ignorance and delusion."

"As you please. How are the Newtons ?"

"Much as usual—he always ill ; she, poor little thing, finding her own comfort in comforting everybody else in trouble. But I do not think they will stay much longer. She does not like to say she gives it up, but it is plain no good

can come of it. Mary Carden has improved wonderfully. I expect she will go away cured soon, and then I shall go too, cured or not."

Whilst Mr. Clarke was speaking, his companion was diligently digging away with the point of his stick, behind a large stone close to where they sat.

"What are you doing?" said Clarke.

"I see something shining down there, between these two pieces of rock, and I want to get it out," replied Hamilton, still working away.

"A treasure no doubt, some hoard of monkish gold, or perchance some ancient Roman's bracelet or collar; let me go shares with you, Hamilton," said his companion, getting up and peeping into the chasm in question, which was a small narrow crevice, between two large stones, half buried in the ground.

A dexterous movement of the stick brought the treasure out of its niche, and laid it on the ground at their feet. Mr. Clarke pounced upon it with a lively exclamation of surprise.

“Fair play, Clarke—hands off, please ; or I shall call the police.”

“There,” replied the other, holding it out on his finger, and dangling it before Hamilton’s eyes, “Did you ever see that before ? Know’st thou this bunch of cornelian and coral ?”

“What should I know of it ?—I don’t wear such trumpery ; give it me, and let me look at it.”

Mr. Clarke did so, and sat down again quietly, whilst his friend turned over the bunch of trinkets which he had disinterred, with a speculative eye.

“Well, I suppose they belong to some young lady ; here are hearts and hands, crosses, dogs, and queer little things, all hung together ; Neapolitan charms, I fancy, and two very pretty seals. We will leave them at the pastry-cook’s, to find an owner.”

“They belong to Miss Denys ; she lost them last week, and very nearly cried for them, she was so vexed. I fancy they were Astley Boyle’s gifts, and of great value in consequence. She

has always declared she has had no luck since she lost them."

"Well, I trust the recovery may be ominous for good," said Hamilton, carefully wiping off the dust and soil they had contracted.

They soon after rose, and returned towards the house, Hamilton going in to arrange himself after his return, and Mr. Clarke sauntering round to the garden, in the hope of seeing something of Annie Carden.

When Hamilton entered the drawing-room, that evening, his return was hailed with so much pleasure by his former friends, that he declared it quite worth while to go away, were it only to receive such a welcome. When the ceremonies of bows and hand-shakes had been concluded, he seated himself by Flora, with an air of being in his accustomed place, which made Norman Grant, who just then entered the room, feel angry and indignant.

He had no idea who the dark, tall man was, who seemed on such easy terms with Miss Denys,

and though he would not have dared to take the seat the stranger occupied, he certainly did not like to see it filled by anybody else. He sat down at a little distance, appearing miserably jealous and uncomfortable, which was quite lost on the cause of his unhappiness, who did not happen to look at him.

Mr. Hamilton was talking to Flora.

"I hope you have not forgotten my former lessons in geology, Miss Denys; have you studied since I went away?"

Flora told him she had been sadly idle; and she feared she had wasted her time abominably.

"But I hope, amidst your wanderings you have discovered and brought me back some curious fossil, some wonderful antiquity, or some new specimen in botany, at least."

"I picked up a trifle or two, which, perhaps, you may value. I don't think it is quite new to you; but I believe you have no fac-simile in your possession."

He laid his hand upon the table, in front of

her, covering something beneath the palm for a moment.

“What will you give me to see what is here?”

“A silver threepence—I am curious to that extent, exactly. What is it? a petrified lizard, or a lump of Cornish diamond, or what?”

He withdrew his hand, looking at her as he did so. Her eager start of joyful surprise, the delight with which she caught up the recovered trinkets, and the happy blushing smile with which she looked at each individually, to see that each was unhurt, were very pleasant to him. She was too enchanted even to thank him for some minutes, her only exclamation being, “My charms!” However, after a lengthened examination of each article, she looked up and said: “What a Goth I am, but, indeed, you have made me almost too glad to express it; you could not have given me much more pleasure. Thank you, very much!”

“Your look was thanks enough, Miss Denys; it is such a pleasure to be able to call up one

look of real, genuine satisfaction in any person's face, that, all other thanks are unnecessary. The obligation is quite equal."

"I cannot think so. Mr. Grant, do you see, Mr. Hamilton has brought me back the charms I lost, and for which we had such a search." Flora, in her delight, forgot the past.

"So I see," replied Norman, "Mr. Hamilton is a happy man!"

"I am glad he has repented and reformed," observed Mr. Clarke, "There is hope for him when he makes restitution of stolen property, but it was too bad of him to carry them off. I wonder you are so lenient, Miss Denys."

"Ah! I never thought of that; how came you by them, Mr. Hamilton?"

"Ask Clarke, he knows—he is a confederate," replied Hamilton, laughing.

"I am not going to turn king's evidence, at least; I hate an informer," replied Mr. Clarke.

"I suspect you are more guilty than Mr. Hamilton," answered she; "for I know I had

them days after he went away ; and though you might have feloniously purloined them, he could not. Come, confess the truth, Mr. Clarke ; do you not know more of these charms than you choose to say ?”

“ Perhaps I do—more of their history, their donor, and, all about him.”

The last words were whispered in an undertone, as he bent over the table, pretending to be looking at the seals.

“ So you have got Astley’s keepsakes again,” observed Mrs. Denys to Flora ; “ how glad I am, my dear ! How did you find them, Mr. Hamilton ? Flora has fretted so for them ; they were given her by her cousin Astley, when they were quite children.”

This observation by no means tended to lessen the high colour which Mr. Clarke’s whisper had called up in Flora’s cheeks. She blushed painfully ; the more so, because she was aware that Norman Grant was listening to the conversation, from the other side of the table, whilst his sister

was standing beside him, with her black eyes fixed on her, with a severe and reproachful look.

"I do not wonder Miss Denys values what she had from her childhood," replied Hamilton, quietly; "lengthened possession gives an imaginary worth even to a trifle; and anything which is associated with scenes and years past beyond recall, is always endeared to us. Is it not so Miss Carden? Do you not prefer, for instance, a West Indian weed, to the most perfect rose of an English garden?"

"I think, perhaps, I do," replied Annie, looking up, a little surprised at being appealed to.

"The *weed* he means, Miss Carden, is a Havana cigar," suggested Mrs. Newton.

"I meant no such offensive and unpoetical ideas, Mrs. Newton, as you very well know. Do not be so malicious and scandalous," retorted Mr. Hamilton.

"Havana cigars at Havana," replied Annie. "They are seldom or never tolerable in England; the climate and manner of living are so different."

“ So inferior,” replied Hamilton, “ that is what you would say, but for regard to our John Bull prejudices.”

“ I think Annie is becoming more acclimated,” observed Mary, who was sitting by ; “ I have heard her admit we have had a pleasant day, and own to admiring a sun-rise.”

“ Sun-rise,” said Mr. Clarke ; “ how could she see that ? the sun rises so unreasonably early now. I understand the performance comes off between four and five.”

“ I admit there are some things I like in England,” replied Annie, “ I am not quite such a republican as I was ; and I like to be allowed to abuse your climate, or your customs, without giving mortal offence by my observations. You certainly permit a tolerable freedom of speech ; and, in spite of Mr. Hamilton’s insinuations, I am not afraid to say what I think.”

“ Very well,” replied he ; “ henceforth I shall give you no credit for generous consideration, or delicate regard for our weakness, ignorance, or

foibles. By the bye, has anything been heard of Graham, or of Mrs. Woodbridge, since they went away ?”

“ They are making the tour of the Lakes of Cumberland,” replied Mr. Clarke. “ I heard of of them from a friend of mine, who met with them at Keswick. I thought you would have heard directly from them. Did not Graham promise to write ?”

“ Yes, one of these good days ; but if he is travelling, he will not have time.”

“ Why did you not tell me you had heard of them, Mr. Clarke !” exclaimed Flora. “ I look upon it as a most unkind and ungenerous act, to have kept such information to yourself.”

“ Dreadfully mean and selfish, I admit,” replied he ; “ but then, what can you expect else, from a man of my character. Allow me, Miss Carden, to hold that skein of silk for you ; to an idle man like me, it will be a perfect luxury.”

She did not refuse ; and as it turned out to be much entangled, arising partly, perhaps, from

the nervous, conscious trepidation with which she had opened it, the couple were fully employed for the next half hour, and, owing to the situation he had chosen, a little abstracted from the rest of the party.

Flora continued to chat with Mr. Hamilton, chiefly about the scenery in Devonshire, and the limestone formation, whilst a good deal of noise and gossip went on round the piano, where some of the ladies, including Louisa Grant, were trying some new music. But, as this was quite at the other end of the room, it did not make much difference to the rest of the party. Norman refused to join his sister; but diverted himself by entering into a disquisition with Mary Carden, on some book which they had both been recently reading; and they disagreed about hero, heroine, and catastrophe, most amicably.

Meanwhile, Mr. Clarke ventured to say to Annie, as she was perseveringly pursuing the intricacies of the silk he held,

“I am so glad to see you wear that bracelet,

Miss Carden. I began to fear association had made it disagreeable, when I missed it yesterday.”

She only coloured a little, and looked down, without answering.

“How rapidly your sister improves!” continued he glancing at Mary, whose smiling animation, as she talked, certainly presented a considerable contrast to her former languid appearance.

“Yes; we shall soon be able to leave this place,” said Annie.

“At which you rejoice?”

“Yes, and no. I am too happy to have her better; but we shall only have to go again amongst strangers; and here we are, in a sort, domesticated, and have friends, whom we may not see again.”

“You have your choice of your future home!” said he, earnestly.

“Yes, certainly; but that power of choice is, in itself, an evil; at least, it springs from our lonely and friendless condition. There are some things one is glad to be obliged to do.”

"I meant more than that," said he.

"I think, myself, Mary would be better for the sea air," was her answer; "and we have talked of Torquay, or the Isle of Wight. Mrs. Woodbridge invited us to join her at one of these places, when she returns from the north; and we expect to hear from her soon. Did your friend know you would be interested about her? and when did you hear?"

"My letter was received this morning; but it was hurried, full of business, and Mrs. Woodbridge and her brother were compressed into a small corner. I wish he had said more, for your sake, now I know you care."

"I daresay we shall hear soon," replied Annie.

"That will be a very nice plan for you, I think," continued he; "under her protection, you would be comfortable and safe; and you could not have a better, pleasanter, more lively companion. Will her brother be with her?"

"Oh, no! he will have to return to his parish; he is only on leave for his health, now. I am

glad you think well of the plan. I like Mrs. Woodbridge very much."

"Torquay, did you say? I think I shall be in that neighbourhood, in the autumn. I know it well. There used to be gardens there, belonging to Tor Abbey, where lemon trees grew as Espaliers, in the open air, and in such profusion, that the fruit lay on the ground, as apples do about the orchards here. That would be a place after your own heart, Miss Carden."

She smiled, and said she thought he must be romancing, or relating a dream; but he insisted on the truth of his descriptions, although he owned it was many years ago that he was at the place, not having visited there since he was a boy.

"The vague impressions arising from early and half-effaced recollections, are not entirely to be trusted," said Annie. "Distance, time, and separation, greatly modify one's ideas and tastes."

"I place implicit belief in my boyish memo-

ries," replied he; "they can only be surpassed, in correctness, by the impressions of later years. If I come to see you at Torquay, Miss Carden, I trust I shall convince you entirely of the strength of my memory, the correctness of my taste, and, more than all, the constancy of my feelings and affections."

Annie did not frown; but she made a terrible entanglement in her silk, dropped the winder, and had to stoop for it, which, perhaps, was what brought so bright a pink into her cheeks at that moment. Blushing was very becoming to her, although her usual paleness was so interesting, that you would hardly have missed the absent colour, if you had never seen it flit across her face. But Mr. Clarke valued the emotion more than the beauty, and drew flattering auguries of future success from the conscious look, and not unkindly glance.

CHAPTER III.

I will bring you a bra' new goon—Jeanie,
I will bring you a bra' new goon—Lassie,
And it shall be a silken ane,
An' trimmed wi' lace an a' Jeanie!

“Miss DENYS, I have a piece of news to tell you,” said Mrs. Newton, as a party were sitting together on the lawn, one cool afternoon.

“I am glad of it, trusting that you would be in no hurry to communicate anything unpleasant,” was Flora's reply.

“I went up yesterday to call on my friend, Miss Fielder,” said Mrs. Newton, “and found—now, guess.”

“Not her old lover,” exclaimed Flora, eagerly.
“You don't say so! what, the Mr. Harris of your story?”

“Exactly so—sitting with her and her father, in an amiable, friendly way, something like old times.”

“What! Edward Harris come back again!” cried Mr. Clarke, with great interest; “when did he turn up, and how?”

“He came to Malvern a few days ago—I did not exactly understand when,” said Mrs. Newton.

“I will go up and call on him,” said he, “immediately, to show my sympathy and respect.”

“He had better wait till he knows how much sympathy and respect is deserved,” remarked Flora. “Do tell us his story, why he went away, and all the possible excuses. Was he really married?”

“His little boy was with him,” said Mrs. Newton, “a very pretty child.”

“Oh, the wretch! I don’t care for the father or child either, only tell us how he came back?” persisted Flora. “But I have no patience with him!”

"I wonder at that, Miss Denys," replied Mr. Clarke, "your stock of patience is generally so extensive. It is hard upon him to be specially excluded."

"Could nobody prevent Mr. Clarke from bullying me?" said Flora, plaintively. "Please go on, Mrs. Newton, and then he will be obliged to hold his tongue."

"Well, I understand that Mrs. Harris is no more—that she died out in Australia, where the gentleman proceeded immediately on his marriage. It appears that, directly after the quarrel, he went up to London, where he had a civil appointment at Sydney offered to him, on condition of going out without delay. What his motives for accepting it were, I cannot pretend to say; but he did, and also married the daughter of the friend through whom the situation was procured. The hurry of his wedding and departure so engrossed him, that he did not even hear of the accident which had occurred to Amelia and her sister, until long after

he had left England ; this accounts for his never writing, or noticing it in any way."

"And his wife—what sort of woman was she?" demanded Flora. "Was he as unhappy as he deserved to be?"

"I cannot venture to say ; I do not think he has been very happy, but whether at having or losing her, I cannot tell. He looks thin and careworn, was very ill on his passage home, and from wearing rather a badly-made wig, joined to the lapse of nine years, is so altered that I should hardly have known him."

"Did he come here in search of Miss Fielder?" asked Flora.

"In search of health, I believe," replied Mrs. Newton. "Their meeting was accidental ; she had walked up to St. Ann's Well, and was waiting to procure a glass of water, whilst a gentleman was filling one ; he was about to hand it to his little boy, but seeing her, courteously offered it to her instead ; she thanked him in a voice which had an electrical effect on

his nerves, their eyes met, and a mutual recognition, and a broken glass, were the consequences. Which had the merit of causing the fracture is not apparent. Amelius told me the story, but he did not know whether papa or Miss Fielder had dropped the tumbler. I suspect it was the work of both."

"Amelius? is that the boy's name? is he like his father?" were Flora's next questions.

"Not in the least; a pretty, pale-faced boy, with long, fair hair, and a rather woe-begone countenance, as if he had lived much alone, or with the melancholy. He was nestled up close to Amelia, and his large blue eyes were fixed on her with a loving, longing look, quite touching; but he does not strike me as likely to live. He has quite the air of a consumptive victim."

"Poor little thing! when did he lose his mother?" inquired Mr. Clarke.

"Before he can remember. I talked to him about my little boys; and he sighed, and wished he had ever had a mamma, in such a piteous,

unnatural sort of way, it quite went to my heart."

"And what do you suppose the result will be, Mrs. Newton?" demanded Flora, again.

"That they will marry in about a month from this time. I do not think the day is fixed yet decidedly; but Amelia said they need not wait very long; she was too old to care about finery."

"Then I most decidedly object to your narrative, Mrs. Newton, as immoral, and highly dangerous in its tendencies," said Mr. Clarke. "Here is a young lady who torments her lover quite out of the kingdom, and nearly out of his senses, who is to end, after all, in mutual happiness ever after."

"Recollect the nine years of sorrow, anxiety, and patient endurance, Mr. Clarke, and perhaps you will not think the penance too slight for the offence."

"Now, I do not agree with Mr. Clarke at all," said Flora; "what strikes me as the defective moral, is the gentleman faring so well.

After deserting her abruptly, marrying another, and leaving the kingdom in that unhandsome way, I do not think he deserved to be freed from his first matrimonial engagement, so as to be able to come home, and form another ; especially with one who will be sure to make him so entirely happy, as your reformed, patient, self-denying Amelia."

" We will hope that her happiness will exceed his, then, in the marriage, which will make matters more equal. I really do not know how to arrange things better," replied Mrs. Newton.

" I remember, when we talked of this before, Miss Denys, I was inclined to justify him for taking her at her word, and believing that she really did not care for him, because she said so hastily. Do you know, I am more of your way of thinking, now ; he should have been patient and hopeful, and given her time to know her own mind," said Mr. Clarke, after grave consideration.

" *He* should, of course," replied Flora ;

“because they had been engaged, and knew very well what each really felt and thought ; but, as a general rule, men should take women at their word, and believe that they mean no, when they say it.”

“I see it is of no use trying to agree with you,” said Mr. Clarke, rather sharply ; “the moment one comes round to your opinion, you adopt another. Not having your versatile genius, I cannot pretend to follow you.”

“If you propounded that doctrine, for the sake of agreeing with me, I am sorry to seem so ungracious ; but you must remember, it is nearly a month since the point was first discussed ; and you cannot be so unreasonable as to expect me not to have changed in that lengthened period,” replied Flora, laughingly.

“Well, at all events, I shall stick to my purpose of seeing Edward Harris again. You don’t happen to know whether he was all the time at Sidney, Mrs. Newton.”

“Yes, I do ; he was latterly at Melbourne.

By the bye, I wonder whether he knew Mr. Boyle ; I never thought of asking him. I will inquire of Mr. Boyle himself, I think."

Some desultory chat succeeded, when Mrs. Newton said she must go in.

Mr. Clarke rose, and accompanied her across the garden. When out of hearing of the others, he said, "You would greatly oblige me, Mrs. Newton, if you would say nothing whatever to Mr. Boyle about Edward Harris. It is more important than you can have any idea of."

"I certainly will not, if you wish it ; but there is some strange mystery about that Mr. Boyle. Do you know anything regarding it, Mr. Clarke?"

"There is a mystery at present ; but I do not think it will continue long. I shall see Edward Harris as soon as I can, and shall then know whether he has anything to do with it. In the mean time, will you avoid even his name ; and, Miss Denys ! do you think you could caution her ?"

"I dare say I could."

"I mean without raising suspicions ; I would not mind letting *you* know all, only it is not my secret ; but the fewer the safer, of course."

"I have no wish to know secrets, Mr. Clarke, I hate them ; only let me know enough to act right. By the bye, can you tell me where the younger Mr. Boyle is, and why he does not write to his aunt or cousin ?"

"That is all part of the mystery."

Mrs. Newton looked uneasy. "I wish I knew."

"And yet you hate a secret—oh, Mrs. Newton !"

"Be quiet, and I will explain ; *they*, the uncle, and Miss Grant, tell Flora that Astley is going to be married to an heiress in London, some Miss Jones."

"Do they ? Well, I will venture to say that it is not true ; not a single iota of it. She may disbelieve every word they say. Astley, when last I heard of him, was at Keswick."

"At Keswick ! you heard ! do you corres-

pond with him, then ?” said Mrs. Newton, in surprise.

“ Yes ; and he has been, I cannot tell how much farther north, Glasgow, I believe, so you see there was no great time for matrimonial engagements in London. However, I fancy he is to get to town to-night. But all this you need not talk of.”

“ May I not tell Flora that he has been out of town on business—that will comfort her so much ; for she is uneasy about some scandalous stories fabricated concerning him.”

“ Yes, I think you may tell her that much ; tell her, too, to cheer up and be patient. I like her better since she has refused that Norman Grant.”

“ How do *you* know that ?”

“ Why, he told me himself, and if I had not engaged entirely on the opposition party, I should almost have wished him success in his efforts.”

“ Then you, who seem to know all and every-

body's business, Mr. Clarke, are decidedly of opinion that Astley is constant and true."

"Right as my glove; surely, Mrs. Newton, you have too much sense to have doubted that?"

"Others might doubt if I did not; you have cleared up much difficulty by your disclosures."

"I hope he will meet his reward, too; he is a fine fellow, I can tell you, every way; I was horridly jealous for him of Norman Grant, at first, but I am satisfied now there is no risk there."

"No; she had not much temptation; such precipitate addresses may well make one doubt the gentleman's sincerity, or knowledge of his own mind," replied Mrs. Newton.

"I do not know that; all people are not alike; a wise observation, which probably never occurred to you, Mrs. Newton; some are like India-rubber balls, taking every shape, and keeping none; light, elastic, and durable; such hearts stand the wear and tear of life admirably; some are like wax, easily moulded, instant-

neously receiving the most delicate impressions with accuracy, and when treated with tenderness, care, and judgment, retaining them with fidelity ; others, again, are like wrought-iron, will take one strong and durable stamp, will stand unmoved against time, weather, use, or even abuse, and lose their form only by the destruction of their substance."

"And of these varieties, which do you consider the most nearly to resemble Mr. Grant's heart?"

"I have not analysed it minutely, and don't pretend to say ; but I should have thought much worse of him if he had *not* proposed to Miss Denys, after the way in which he has been going on ; few things make me more indignant, than the licence men allow themselves in this particular matter. It is a horrid shame, when a man goes just as far as he can without committing himself, and then draws back in time, I presume, to save his own conscience, but not quite to prevent vain hopes, perhaps ; certainly

not idle gossip and unpleasant reports. The power that we have of choice and selection, and the impossibility of retaliation, or even vindication on your part, make it so dastardly a cruelty to trifle purposely. I never can forgive it."

"I suppose sometimes, however, it is the result of thoughtlessness," said Mrs. Newton, "not deliberate cruelty. Gentlemen follow their own inclinations in seeking the society of a pleasant woman, and do not think of anything but amusement, until roused by reports of what the neighbourhood expect. Then they start back suddenly. I have often seen it!"

"The expectations of the neighbourhood, Mrs. Newton, are much more often founded on a sense of moral justice, than the conduct of men is. I look upon it, that reports of the nature you allude to seldom originate without there being some foundation; and if the public says a man ought to marry a woman, why, he generally ought, although he very often does not.

Never wedding, ever wooing,
See you not the wrong you're doing,
In my cheeks pale hue !
All my life with sorrow strewing,
Wed, or cease to woo !

Miss Denys will not have to reproach Norman Grant in those terms. Well, I dare say you are wanting to go in. Remember my caution, please."

And so they parted.

In the mean time, Norman himself had rather an unpleasant discussion with his sister. The refusal of Flora, and the steady discouragement which she gave him, rather mortified and irritated him. He had been accustomed pretty much to his own way all his life, and used to think that he had only to make himself agreeable to be perfectly acceptable to any woman. Perhaps, had he tried the experiment before, he would earlier have been convinced that he was not irresistible ; but he had adopted opinions much in vogue amongst a certain class of young men, who affect to believe that all women are

desperately set on matrimonial speculations, and that it requires great caution and care for a man with the slightest claims to good looks, or the rank of a gentleman, to avoid their snares, and keep himself from being "hooked into an engagement," as they elegantly term it. He had rarely, therefore, troubled himself to be more than once agreeable to any young woman, judging that an hour of his fascinating conversation was as much as any female head could stand, without fatal consequences to one or both parties; so that it really was quite a new idea to him, and as unexpected as unpleasant, that in spite of his accomplishments, small talk, whiskers, and horses, he met with a calm, deliberate repulse, the very first time he had ever attempted to make an impression.

To do him justice, too, there was something more than mortified vanity in the case.

He had really begun to like Flora; to find her captivating, to think of her with pleasure. The effort to attach her, had produced greater

effect on his own heart than on hers, and he regretted more than her property—he regretted herself. But an idea had dawned gradually on his mind, which, whilst it soothed his vanity, rather irritated his temper. He was sure there really was a rival, and that Louisa ought to have known it—perhaps, did know it, and had concealed it.

The loss of the trinkets had slightly raised suspicions; the recovery of them confirmed them. This Astley, this nominal cousin, known from childhood, whose keepsakes were so highly valued, and whose name raised such a colour in her face—could he really be an object of indifference himself? There might be no engagement of her hand, but he could not believe that her heart was equally free; and it was in rather an injured tone, that he remonstrated with his sister for her want of candour; she ought to have warned him of this circumstance.

Louisa defended herself very well; she assured him that, if any faith could be put in

declarations from either party, she had reason to believe there was no attachment. Astley Boyle had expressly declared to his uncle that he had no designs on Flora's hand, and he had said much the same sort of thing in her hearing.

What more assurance could he require ? As to her blushing, that might go for nothing ; it was as often the effect of chance or accident, or, perhaps, of the mere fear of being supposed to care, as of any real or profound hidden sentiment. Some women never spoke without blushing, especially when others listened besides the person addressed. If Norman had no more substantial cause of jealousy and despair than her blushes, he might be very well satisfied indeed.

Still, Norman did not seem to think so, and was fidgetty and uneasy, even threatening to go away, which alarmed his sister very much. Patience ! if he would but have patience, all might yet be well ; a few days might make all

the difference. Did she not merit a little longer trial? He owned, himself, that the time was very short. Why not give her a more lengthened period? she and her property were well worth it. And it would be so disagreeable, look so ill, be so shocking to her, to have her brother going away, just before her marriage. He must stay to give her away; and so soon as they were to part, too—he could not be so unkind and unbrotherly!

Norman yielded, and promised to remain.

Louisa had been a good deal disappointed at the refusal which Norman had received; she had calculated on a different result. Still, she trusted to time, perseverance, and his talents, working on Flora's disappointment about Astley, her mortified maiden pride, and her fear of meeting scorn and ridicule for an unsuccessful attachment. All these chances were in his favour, and, had she been likely to remain with the parties, she would have felt no fear as to the result. For this object, she would gladly

have delayed her marriage for a time, but to this, Mr. Boyle objected, with a warmth and pertinacity too flattering to be resisted. The pleasant conviction that he was very much in love with her, had a charm equally novel and complimentary, besides giving her lively hopes of eventually securing a very much larger dower than her bridegroom had volunteered to settle on her.

Excepting the smallness of the proposed sum, her settlements were perfectly satisfactory to her brother and herself, and orders had already been transmitted to the bankers through whom his business was transacted, to transfer to the hands of trustees—of whom Norman was one—the twelve thousand pounds which had been promised for her future use. Her projected marriage had been duly announced to her uncle, the baronet, her second cousin, the peer, and such other friends and relatives as were likely to interest themselves in the affair. She had received many letters of congratulation on her pleasant

prospects from all concerned. Those relatives, especially, who had latterly felt Louisa Grant a dead weight on their hands, and the necessity of accepting her visits as a great bore, were now delighted to hear of her happy prospects. It was just what their dear Louisa had deserved; they had always prophesied that she would make a good match, and they sincerely wished her joy with all their hearts. They hoped they should not lose her quite—her presence now would always be welcome; and when she settled, as of course she would, in some country-house in England, they trusted they should be amongst those who would, by their visits, show their pleasure in the connection, and nothing would gratify them more than to make the acquaintance of Mr. Boyle. These pleasant epistles were usually accompanied by a bracelet, a brooch, or a papier-maché blotting-book; and now that her trousseau was coming home, and her wedding presents making their appearance, Louisa Grant's room became one of the most fashionable lounges

of an afternoon, for some of the ladies in the establishment, and for her out-of-door friends at Malvern, whilst she herself was, beyond question, the most popular, most fortunate, most happy, and most envied young woman in the world.

Many were the whispered colloquies which passed in corners of the drawing-room, on the stairs, or in the garden, of which such words as Honiton, brocade, bonnets, and fashions, formed prominent parts. Ladies who had Irish lace to dispose of for charity, or stocks of crotchet, or knitting, which they carried about for sale, availed themselves of this splendid opportunity ; and even the shopkeepers seemed to know what was impending, and produced their choicest and most extravagant articles when the bride-elect appeared.

Nobody could enjoy all this distinction more thoroughly than Louisa did. It was ample compensation for such minor mortifications as Mr. Boyle's occasional vulgarities ; the coolness

with which some gentlemen seemed to regard him, was quite overbalanced by the delightful sensation of knowing herself an object of envy to so many young ladies.

She spared no pains to give her approaching marriage all the *éclat* which the opportunity offered ; and on the principle, probably, that marriages do not come often, was resolved to make the most of it now. All this seemed to be grievously against the bridegroom's wishes. With the shyness natural to men on an occasion when they have to go through an important ceremony without having the advantage of being interesting, and to form a conspicuous object, in ordinary broad-cloth, unsustained by the supporting influence of brocade and bridal veils, he would have been glad to have hushed up the affair in the quietest way possible. Indeed, he was but little aware of what was before him, until the arrangements were all made ; and as the time drew near, and it was too late to retract, he seemed to nerve himself desperately

for an exhibition in which he feared he should not play a graceful part.

Louisa Grant might well be forgiven for a little triumph in securing so promising an establishment for herself. She had no ties of home to break, no parent to leave regretting her absence ; no old accustomed duties, occupations, and pleasures to renounce. Her previous life had not been a very happy one ; she might fairly anticipate satisfaction from a change. But more than all, to account for her wish of display, there were no strong feelings concerned. Nobody for a moment believed that she loved Mr. Boyle, or that she had any motive for the marriage except the wish to be rich ; consequently, it was perfectly consistent and suitable to make as much display as possible. She took him for his worldly goods, and this was her first step towards enjoyment.

The shrinking, bashful, maiden modesty, which would naturally have prompted retirement, and the deep, true love which would have made an exhibition of itself irksome and unwelcome,

were not there to be outraged by publicity, or concealed for decorum. Her conduct was perfectly consistent, and in exact agreement with her principles. Could the same be said of every bride who plays her part in the marriage ceremony, perhaps the weddings of those who live for this world alone, would not be so closely imitated by those who profess to renounce it, and seek better things.

Be that as it may, Louisa Grant had set herself diligently to seek admiration and envy, at the expense of delicacy, truth, and rectitude, and she now seemed in a fair way of attaining her object; whilst the prospect of wealth and worldly enjoyment filled in the future, completely to her own satisfaction.

As she stood there, holding up for admiration the delicate veil and wreath which were to adorn her head, that her companions might wonder at the expensive lace, or pointing out with smiles the trinkets which covered her dressing-table, her dark eyes flashing with pleasure, and the

rich colour glowing on her handsome face, she seemed the impersonation of gratified vanity.

And yet would you have been in her place for the sake of that petty triumph ; or would you have preferred her feelings to those of Flora Denys, who was at that moment sitting abstractedly in silence in her own room, trying to banish painful and unpleasant thoughts, by schemes for the good of others, and resolving to repair the neglect of a somewhat wasted girlhood, by earnest application to business and duty hereafter.

Or, was she really more happy than Annie Carden, who had refused the man she could not love, although he offered what she so much needed and longed for — protection, and a home ; a kind and sheltering home to herself, and to her sister.

I admit that her temptation was great ; that educated in the style of fashionable frivolity, which twenty years ago was considered the most fit and proper for a girl of her station, she had

little resource but to marry. Matrimony was the only asylum to which she could look to screen her from the weariness, the self-torment, the scorn and contempt, with which an aimless and narrow-minded old-maidhood would be visited. She had been taught music, and dancing, sketching, and flower-painting ; to these useful employments, had been added a slight knowledge of Italian, and a tolerable acquaintance with French. These were the provisions made for the dull season of middle life, or the decaying faculties of nature ; or, rather, these were the means put into her hands by art ; which, in connection with her handsome face, it was expected would procure her an establishment suitable to her rank in life. These were the weapons with which she was to fight her battle of life ; and if these did not succeed, what was there before her ?—to live uncared-for and useless, to die unlamented and forlorn.

This was a prospect she could not endure ; and, to save herself from this, she had agreed to

be the wife of an old man, of whose manners she was ashamed, of whose disposition she was ignorant, and whose principles, she had but too much reason to know, were set to no higher a standard than her own.

The seed sown in childhood and youth had now blossomed into action—the fruit would be developed in futurity alone.

CHAPTER IV.

For who hath aught to love, and loves aright,
Will never in the darkest strait despair ;
For out of love, exhales a living light ;
A light that speaks—a light whose breath is prayer.

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

THE visit which Mr. Clarke promised himself to pay to Mr. Harris, we may presume was duly accomplished. He joined his former acquaintance after morning service, on Sunday, and walked away with him. That was nearly all that was known of his proceedings amongst his usual friends and companions. Mr. Clarke was so accustomed to be erratic in his course, that this circumstance excited no surprise ; and even on his return in the evening, shortly before bed-

time, no questions were asked him, nor did it transpire whether he had spent his Sunday, as he often did, with Mr. and Mrs. Cuthbert, or entirely in company with Mr. Harris.

Neither did any one know the name of the stranger who entered the dining-room the next morning, in his company, whilst some of the gentlemen were playing billiards, and others reading the papers in their favourite lounging-corners. Mr. Clarke introduced his friend to no one, except the room, on which he observed as they walked down it, that it was a noble apartment. Twice did they traverse the whole length of the dining-room, in a leisurely way, stopping for a considerable period, exactly opposite the window in which Mr. Boyle was niched behind the Morning Post. They then went away and walked out of the house in company.

In about half an hour, Clarke returned alone, and, tapping his friend on the shoulder, said aloud,

“Hamilton, I cannot take the walk I pro-

mised this afternoon. Don't break your heart, and I will try and bear it too; but I find I must go to London for a couple of days, and have to set off this very afternoon."

Hamilton replied, looking up from his 'Times,'

"Necessity knows no law; so I will endeavour to submit with dignity and resolution to the reverses of fortune. But, if you cannot walk the whole way, go a part, at least. I will set off this minute, if you will come too."

"I could do that, I think;" and they rose, and left the house. As they walked up the village together, Clarke intimated to his companion, that he desired to call at the post-office. They went in; and whilst Hamilton was carelessly noticing the various bills and advertisements stuck about, he was rather surprised by hearing his companion say to the post-master, "Do not send any of my letters down to the house until you see me again. Mr. Hamilton, this gentleman, will call and fetch them away."

The post-master looked at Mr. Hamilton,

whom he knew already pretty well by sight, and assented to the proposal. The friends walked on.

“Anything else in my small way?” said Hamilton, with a comic air of meek resignation. “I only hope I shall not hear that I am to read these letters, as well as fetch them for you.”

“Not all of them,” replied Clarke, with a graver look than usual.

“I am thankful for that,” continued Hamilton; “but please go on—let me know the worst at once. Am I to do anything more—to take your place, for instance, near the window of that room which opens on the gravel?”

“My dear Hamilton, I want you to do me a favour,” said Clarke.

“Seriously?” ejaculated the other, surprised at his grave look and voice.

“Seriously; and I am sure I may depend on you,” replied his friend.

“Anything in the world you may command, Clarke,” said Hamilton, with most friendly warmth and earnestness. “Time, money, trouble,

interest, whatever I have, is at your service. You have only to speak."

"I will encroach as little as I can. First, I ask profound secrecy."

"Granted," was the reply.

"Amongst my letters to-morrow morning (possibly, indeed, to-night, but more likely to-morrow morning), there may, perhaps, be one with a cross in the left-hand corner of the address. Open and read it, and if it tells me to do anything whatever, will you promise to comply, if in your power; I hope to be back to-morrow evening, consequently, your time of responsibility is short."

"Well, Clarke, I trust you, as I would do my brother, and feel sure you would not ask me to do what should be left undone. For your sake, I will make this blindfold promise."

"Thank you heartily. The next thing is, keep an eye on old Boyle, and if you discover the slightest inclination to bolt, or if you hear from others anything that makes you suspicious,

just despatch my man to the railroad immediately, and send up an electric telegraph message to that effect, to this address."

He gave him Mr. Allen's office card.

Hamilton contemplated it in silence. Clarke went on after a little consideration :

" Besides this, I have nothing to recommend to you, except silence and caution. See everything without looking, hear everything without listening ; be everywhere at once !"

" That may be all very well for a little, sharp, ubiquitous fellow like you, Clarke," replied Hamilton, gravely, " but how can you expect it of me ?"

" Do your best—I know you will. I have embarked heart and soul in this cause, and shall know no peace unless we succeed in unmasking—" he stopped.

" Boyle, eh ! I wonder why you should expect him to bolt ; he seems to me very steady ; and more still, why you should care if he does. Has it anything to do with Miss Carden, Clarke?"

"Nothing on earth; neither is it really my affair. I am agent for another. You will see whom, if you open the letter, I expect."

"That a man of your sense and years, Clarke, should have such a passion for meddling, does surprise me. What can it matter to you whether Miss Grant marry this man or not?"

"I am not going to defend my conduct now, except just to say, that it is a pure matter of friendship, undertaken at the earnest request of the parties concerned. I daresay a great lazy fellow like you may not see any pleasure in taking trouble; still I must depend on you now."

"And can I do nothing for you in the other line; have you no parting speech for me to report to Miss Carden. Do let me take your office there, and make myself agreeable in your name."

"Thank you; but I do not transact my own business by deputy. I prefer making parting speeches on my own account."

"In short, you have no objection to my doing your dirty work for you, but keep all the fees of office and perquisites for your own share."

"Precisely," replied Clarke, coolly.

"I think Miss Denys ill-used," observed Hamilton, abruptly.

"It can't be helped now ; and it will do her good ; but it will all come right in the end," replied Clarke.

"I like her, and I am sorry for her," persisted Hamilton, "either Astley Boyle ought to have gone sooner, or not at all."

"It is no use talking about that—I expect he will soon be back ; now I must go home to get things ready for my little expedition, I see it is time. Good-bye Hamilton, and mind how you behave !"

He turned back, intent on having an interview with Annie Carden before he left Malvern, and calculating with tolerable certainty on finding Mary taking one of her small walks at this particular time. Nor was he disappointed, the

sisters were in the garden, and he joined them immediately. His object was, of course, to explain to them, that his impending absence was compulsory, and he hoped would be short; at all events, that he should return as soon as necessary business would allow.

Annie Carden bore the idea of his absence with calmness and composure; there was nothing in her countenance from which he could draw any improved hope, or augur that he had made much progress in her affections. Mary was kind, regretted his absence, and gave him a commission for her in London; but he could not persuade her sister to do the same, and although very happy to oblige Mary, it certainly was not the same thing as being of service to Annie herself.

He was forced to leave them at last, and went away almost in as great a state of uncertainty as to his ultimate prospect of winning Miss Carden's hand, as he had been a week ago.

But he was of a sanguine temperament; the

happiness of not being easily depressed, and of expecting all would turn out well, was his in a great degree.

"I am glad he is gone," said Annie, as they sat down together in their own room.

"And if it were not for you," replied her sister, "I should say I shall be glad when he comes back. I think we shall miss him!"

"Yes, in one sense we shall. I wish he would go away altogether; I like him very much, Mary, so don't shake your head at me, and look shocked at my ingratitude. I like him so much that I cannot bear he should be wasting his time in making love to me. If he would only go and find somebody suited to him, who would make him happy!"

"It does not strike me that is at all likely; I should say that even if you do not change, neither will he. I do not imagine his object is to marry, in a general sense; he fell in love with you, and so he wishes to marry you. If his idea had been that matrimony makes a

man respectable, gives him a standing in society, and a lien on life, and therefore he had looked about for a wife to suit him, I daresay he would have tried somewhere else, when not able to procure what he wished for here."

"And you do not think he will now," replied Annie, smiling faintly.

"No; I do not. He wants to marry for the sake of marrying you, not to marry you for the sake of being married. I do not say that he is not likely to recover from his passion, when entirely removed from you, but I do not think he is likely to form another."

"You do think very highly of him I know, Mary," replied Annie.

"Yes, and I shall miss his society and conversation; but if it makes you happier that will not signify, Annie."

Annie really believed what she said, when she declared herself glad he was gone, and she thought it so very often all that afternoon, that if the quantity of remembrances bestowed on

him could be considered as equivalent for the quality, Mr. Clarke ought to have been satisfied.

She told herself she was glad that she could stroll in the garden, without risk of meeting him, and rather wondered to find that after all the solitary stroll was dull.

She rejoiced greatly to go and call with Mary on Mrs. Cuthbert, to whose house they went that afternoon, by special invitation, since now she was safe from his presence there; and she took the most particular satisfaction in pointing out to her sister any little object in the least connected with the events of her first visit; finally falling into a reverie in the conservatory, and recalling, with singular accuracy, his looks, expressions, tones, and words, on that occasion.

It seemed, however, to her, as if something were wanting there, and in most other places. Mrs. Cuthbert was as charming as ever, but then she was chiefly occupied by Mary; and, as to Mr. Cuthbert, although a pleasant, joyous,

frank-mannered man, he appeared to care more about his wife than any one else, and had a perpetual way of referring to her tastes and habits, of quoting Bessie's thoughts, or Bessie's sayings, that was very proper in him, no doubt, but not very interesting to Annie. At least, it was not so pleasant as the intuitive perception of her wishes, the deference for her opinion, the patient attention to her fancies, and the evident desire for her approbation, to which she had been lately accustomed.

Annie believed herself exceedingly consistent, and intended to be quite frank with herself; but she did not immediately discover that these sensations arose from the circumstance that Mr. Clarke had become really important to her, and that his society, at the want of which she expected to rejoice, had, in fact, for some time past, constituted her chief enjoyment.

Shyness, and recollections of past awkwardness, might sometimes make her uncomfortable in his company, but these evils were not sufficient to counterbalance a very large share of

pleasure, the existence of which had hitherto been unsuspected.

It was the same in the evening ; how dull and flat that seemed ; nothing to interest—nothing to excite.

Perhaps Miss Carden was not the only one who felt that Monday evening dull. The party in the drawing-room was smaller than usual. There were billiards going on in the dining-room, which seemed to engross all the gentlemen ; and Louisa Grant was unable to find anything more interesting, than discussing some recent patterns for cuffs and collars, and looking over a new book of fashions with some other young ladies.

Flora Denys was deeply engaged by a book, and sunk back in an easy chair, appeared happily unconscious of the absence or presence of any member of their former party ; whilst her mother, sitting beside her, was occupied partly by her knitting, and partly by some desultory chat with Mary Carden.

Flora was feeling rather more depressed and

uneasy than Annie had any occasion to be. The mystery which hung over Astley and his concerns was quite as great as ever, and tormented her more than she liked. No answer of any kind had been received from her uncle, nor had even Louisa mentioned Astley's name to her in any connection. A sort of truce seemed to be tacitly agreed on between the different parties, but she almost wished it were otherwise; she felt as if she would rather be at open war, than going on in a way which covered ill-will under the mask of courtesy. She would rather they had spoken of Astley, even if it had been to abuse, or misrepresent him. Then she should have been justified in defending him, in denying all aspersions on his character, in speaking of him, at least, in some way. Whereas, now she had determined not to mention his name, unless obliged to do so, and she meant to keep her resolution in that respect. As to not thinking of him, that was impossible.

His wishes, his censure, his opinions, his tastes—whether he would approve, what he

would think, advise, or do, these were constantly recurring. To direct her future life without his help, appeared to her like studying a foreign language without a grammar. He had been, indeed, the grammar of her life—the source from which she had either consciously or unconsciously derived every rule of action, and almost every right idea she possessed.

What she would be without him she could not tell; but she supposed that everybody had not an Astley to guide them, and yet, how well every one except herself seemed to do without.

The rules he had given, the principles he had taught, she must learn to apply for herself, and she must trust that, if called on to walk alone, strength would come to assist her.

She did not receive the comfort which Mrs. Newton might have given her, by assurances of his constancy, for she resolutely denied herself the gratification of discussing the subject with her friend. She set herself to learn her lesson, with a rigid determination, from which she

would allow no excuse for swerving, and her calm exterior made Mrs. Newton suppose her far more tranquil internally than she really was.

She could not help looking back with regret to much wilfulness in former times, connected with Astley and his advice. She remembered how he had dissuaded them from coming to Malvern, and how she had carried her point, as much out of opposition to him, as from any other motive. Now she bitterly regretted the circumstance. Who could tell how much of all this might have happened but for her determination to come here! Mr. Boyle's intended marriage—Astley's, also, if that was true, and all which these included—had sprung from that one source. She was severely punished for her self-will and capricious obstinacy.

If she could only turn the punishment to some good; if she could grow more steady, self-denying, considerate for others, and humble as regarded herself, it would not have been all in vain. So thought Flora, with mingled hope and fear—much more of the latter than the

former, however—and so unconsciously to herself, she proved that the discipline was producing good effects, and promising to plant the seeds of some needful graces in her heart.

She was sorry to see Norman Grant going about, looking so generally disconsolate and depressed, and yet so humble and worshipping towards her.

She really could not tell what to do with him. She could not consider herself to blame for his disappointment. She had not purposely encouraged his attentions; in fact, she had never attached any importance to them. So many men assume an air of devotion to any pretty girl with whom they are in company for a time, that she had supposed it to be his way. To have repressed and avoided what probably meant nothing, would, in her opinion, have been absurd and affected. Who would have supposed that he could fall in love with her in a week! Sometimes she entirely disbelieved the fact; at all times she considered that her property had a large share of influence over his passion.

She would have been very glad if he would have gone away. Not the gladness of Annie Carden, at Mr. Clarke's departure, but a real, thorough, honest sense of relief which his absence would indisputably have occasioned her. She supposed this was too much to expect, however, just before his sister's marriage ; after that, Thursday once over, then there could be no more cause for delay ; then he would surely take himself off entirely.

She had thought of their own leaving the Establishment, and going into lodgings ; but the season was at its height, and there were no lodgings suitable to their wants just then vacant. In another week they could have their choice of several sets of apartments, but that would be no present advantage. And even then she rather doubted the good of this plan. Her mother would be sure to worry herself again about domestic matters, as she always would do, when the opportunity offered, and perfect repose of mind was what she needed ; whilst lodgings would probably be dull, without other company

than herself, and away from her accustomed pursuits, and the interest of home life.

Flora gave up this idea, and resolved again to be patient and hopeful. Thursday would soon come, and then all this nonsense and provoking folly about finery and pomp would be over; Mr. and Mrs. Boyle would be gone on their way to be happy, and it was to be hoped that Norman Grant, too, would carry his addresses to more willing ears, and lay his devotion at the feet of a more grateful idol. Such were Flora's meditations during the course of Monday; and such pretty much the ideas she derived from the pages of the volume she so earnestly contemplated during that dull evening. She was roused a little before its close, by the approach of Mr. Hamilton, who sat down to give her an account of the walk he had taken during that day, to bewail the absence of Mr. Clarke, and especially to talk over the charms of Mr. Graham and his sister.

The latter subject, indeed, was the uppermost just then, for he had that evening received a letter from the clergyman, giving him an ac-

count of their travels, parts of which he read aloud for the benefit of those who knew them. Everybody who did, conspired to praise the two absent ones. For this, Louisa Grant left her fashions; Flora became animated, and Annie eloquent on this topic; there had been no such universal favourites in the house, and none so greatly regretted.

Norman Grant had strolled into the room just before Hamilton entered it, and his attention was aroused by the earnest interest which Flora seemed to show to what that gentleman was saying to her. He had before noticed, with something like jealousy, the easy terms on which these two appeared to be; and with the idea that what he coveted himself must be an object of desire to every one else, he fancied that Hamilton also was a suitor to the fair heiress. It was only his own wishes which prompted this fear; nothing could be farther removed from love-making than the gentleman's manners, which had that sort of easy, friendly openness, not very unnatural in a man of forty-five, towards a pleasant girl of Flora's age.

Norman was both absurd and unjust; for sometimes he thought Miss Denys in love, and sometimes accused her of coquetting with Hamilton, whilst, in fact, there was not the smallest ground for either imputation.

Hamilton divided his attention pretty much between Flora and Mrs. Newton, because he liked them both, and pitied them both. It would have been pleasant to him also to have conversed with Annie Carden, whom he admired in a moderate way very much; but he understood his friend's injunctions to imply that he should not do this—so he refrained.

It was just as well for her absent lover's cause that Miss Carden was left to herself; the monotony of her evening might have been too agreeably diversified by Hamilton's conversation, and although Mr. Clarke would undoubtedly have regretted sincerely that she should be dull or unhappy, perhaps he might have borne the circumstance with philosophy, had he known the result would be very favourable to reminiscences of his powers of pleasing.

CHAPTER V.

Wild were the walks upon those lonely Downs,
Track leading into track ; how marked, how worn,
Into bright verdure, between fern and gorse,
Winding away its never ending line
On their smooth surface, evidence was none.

THE EXCURSION.

THE ensuing Tuesday was one of those oppressively hot days, which sometimes come on us in an English summer, and seem to stifle our unaccustomed constitutions. The sky was concealed by low-hanging clouds, which excluded the brightness, but seemed to double the warmth of the sun. The air was perfectly still, not a breath played among the elms, or swayed the tall branches of the pear-trees. All was calm ; the calm not of repose but of exhaustion,

scarcely a bird twittered in the hedge-rows, the grass-hoppers ceased to chirp, the sheep on the hill-side stood in panting circles, with pendant heads, all pointing inwards. Dogs could not bark for langour, and the cattle were all recumbent in the meadows.

Nobody seemed to like to move that day. Mrs. Denys' coachman reported it too hot for his horses to go out, and Mrs. Denys was glad he thought so, as she was rejoiced to be spared the trouble of exertion, Flora had a head-ache, and did not leave their room all the morning, not even to go to dinner ; but in the afternoon she was seized with an unaccountable fit of restlessness, and she declared she would go out and walk ; perhaps it would be cooler on the hill ; it could not be hotter, and air would do her good. She went. At the foot of the stairs she encountered Hamilton, who asked with some interest, on seeing her in her bonnet, if she were up to a walk.

She told him she was going for a stroll, and rather to her surprise, he turned and left the

house with her. They had not gone many yards together, before he said: "I have been wanting to see you the whole morning, having something particular to show you, so I hope you will let me walk with you."

She replied, "certainly," and they walked on.

He said nothing more, except to ask her to take one path rather than another, and she having put herself under his direction, and not much caring to talk, walked on leisurely up the road. A more silent and abstracted couple seldom has trod the steep ascent to St. Ann's Well. Was it the general hush of nature, the stillness of the atmosphere, the sort of waiting, expecting feeling which oppressed the country, and seemed to keep everything in suspense, was it these which weighed on their spirits also, and chained their tongues, and set their faculties to sleep?

They seemed to have the whole of the hill to themselves; no one was stirring of all the gay visitors, and, for some time, not a creature was in sight.

Flora was roused to attention at last by the silence and solitude, and stopping when they had ascended some little distance on the path to Mathon, she said, quietly :

“ I do not think I shall go any further to-day.”

“ Yes, a little way,” said he, “ you must come on, we shall soon find what I am in search of.”

She thought him odd, but she complied. Just afterwards she saw a man's figure arise on the top of the hill, which, standing out against the western sky, cloudy as it was, shewed dark, and seemed taller than natural.

They advanced a little nearer, and then the figure on the ridge of the hill, extended a stick, and performed certain telegraphic signals, which Flora perceived with wonder were repeated by Mr. Hamilton. She looked at him amazed.

“ Don't look so dreadfully scared, Miss Denys,” said he, smiling, “ we mean you no harm. I will speak to that man first, who has a little business with me, and then rejoin you, if you will have the kindness to wait here two minutes.”

“Very well, I will sit down.” She did so, and he walked hastily on. She saw the two meet, and watched them with much curiosity. She was now near enough to distinguish the stranger’s dress. He seemed to be a countryman, wore a waggoner’s frock, and fustian trousers, with a broad straw hat, down low on his brow; but he had a tall, active, erect figure, and a light, elastic tread as he came forward, not like the heavy, plodding step of the generality of rustics. His appearance interested her; and when, after a few minutes colloquy, Mr. Hamilton advanced towards her, and asked if she would come on, she was glad to find the stranger still stood close to the path, so as to give her the opportunity of passing near him.

They were within two yards, and she was just taking a hasty glance, when he raised his hat, advanced a step, and confronted her directly.

It was with a feeling of something between horror and fear, that she perceived that the individual before her was Astley Boyle. Her instantaneous conviction was, that he had in some

way committed himself to such a degree, as to be obliged to fly in disguise from the pursuit of justice, that he was a criminal, and that this was a plan, perhaps, of his, for influencing her to—she had not time to think what ; for he exclaimed, as she drew back from his proffered hand :

“Do you not know me, Flora?”

She stepped back a pace, and, making a repelling motion, she answered faintly, “No.”

“It is Astley,” said Hamilton, believing she really was ignorant of his identity.

“I shall go home,” said she, with dignified composure. “Mr. Hamilton, why did you bring me here?”

“No, no, my dear Miss Denys, do no such thing. Just stay, and speak to your cousin kindly,” replied Hamilton, absolutely laughing. “I grant he is rather discreditable in appearance just now ; but I trust nobody will see you, and to-morrow he will be back in London, and wearing broadcloth again like a gentleman.”

She looked from one to the other in doubt.

“Flora,” said Astley, “have you forgotten your

promises to me, and allowed prejudices to influence your mind—prejudices which you promised me you never would believe.”

“Have *you* any right to recal the past, Astley?” said she, standing still, however, when he advanced a step.

“I trust I have done nothing to forfeit any claim I may have had in past times, Flora,” replied he. “Hamilton, will you keep an eye on the path, whilst Flora and I sit down here, and have a little explanation?”

Hamilton nodded assent, and pacing on to the crest of the hill, took up his station, where he could command such a view, as would effectually ensure the young people from the unexpected intrusion of passengers.

Astley took Flora’s hand, and made her sit down on a projecting mossy rock; and then, half-sitting, half-kneeling at her feet, he leant on the stone, and looked up gravely in her face.

From old habit, she submitted to his guidance at first, and then remembering suddenly more

recent events, she enquired, with something of her bygone impatience :

“What is the meaning of this, Astley ? What brings you here ?”

“Of what, dear Flora ?” said he, still looking at her.

“Of this disguise, this secrecy, this fear of detection ! Can it be right.”

“I trust it is not wrong. Flora, have you quite lost your faith in me ?”

She paused ; she could not say she had. She might be impatient ; but she could not, with those eyes looking up at her, deliberately say she doubted his truth.

“Dearest Flora,” said he, taking her hand again, “far dearer to me than any other earthly being, tell me you do still believe me. I can bear anything, but that you should mistrust me.”

“Astley,” said she, looking down, and cringing as she spoke, “have you any right to speak to me thus ?”

“Every right, except that of your permission, Flora—the right of long, long faithful, unanswer-

ving love ; the permission of your guardian, the prospect of equality in wealth, which clears me from all suspicions of interested motives—all—every right—to say I love you dearly, devotedly ; have loved you from boyhood, and believe that I shall love you till death.”

She closed her eyes, and held her breath. It seemed a dream—a dear, delicious dream, from which she feared to awake to the dull, cold, painful realities of that very morning.

“ Will you not speak to me ? ” said he, more earnestly still.

“ Can this be true ? ” was all she could say. Thoughts of old time—of his denial of loving her, of Miss Jones, and his supposed engagement, of the charges against his character, and then, suspicions of his present sincerity, all came into her mind, and made her brain a chaos. Had he been baffled, disappointed in his pursuit of her rival ; and was he now come to extract from her, as a last resource, the confession of her love.

He saw the doubt in her face, and was inexpressibly pained.

“It is as true, Flora, as that you sit there, or as that I am beside you. You did not used to require asseveration from me; and if you will not believe my simple word, how can I expect you to credit any repetition of it. Only tell me of what you suspect me.”

His tone showed her how much he was hurt. He was the same Astley still, in those quick feelings, and that generous warmth which made suspicion hateful. It was very hard for her to keep up the appearance of reserve.

“Astley, I have heard many things said of you, wrong things imputed to you, which your silence, absence, and now this disguise, appear to justify!”

“What sort of things?” said he, proudly, and drawing back a little.

“I was told, Astley, that you were extravagant, reckless, trying to extort money from your uncle, which he declined to give, because he feared it would be misapplied. I was told you

played, and I heard too that since you left Malvern, you had been paying your addresses to a Miss Jones, in London. I saw letters which confirmed all this."

"I see," said he, "I trusted you too implicitly, Flora. You promised not to believe these tales, and I relied on your word. None but your own mouth should have made me doubt your perfect fidelity to your promise."

She was touched by the reproach, and still more by the tender and sad tone in which it was made. Tears came into her eyes, and she answered :

"I will believe you now, Astley. Is this all true or false?"

"Flora, the day after I went from here, I was obliged to go down to the Highlands, then to Glasgow, where I spent two days ; from thence, I crossed Ireland, returned again to Glasgow, came down by the lakes of Cumberland, and not till then, back to London. I have been gone a fortnight. Tell me, then, is it possible that I can have been courting any woman in London?"

"No," murmured she, with a feeling of relief, almost too great for her to find a voice.

"Then you acquit me there. Look here." As he spoke, he unfolded Louisa Grant's letter to him, and showed her that part which related to his uncle's gift to him of five hundred pounds.

"Does that imply that I have been grasping, or extorting money? You see, she says, 'your uncle's free gift, as a testimony to his affection and esteem.' Do the stories coincide?"

"No," again, was all she uttered.

"And Flora," added he, with her hand in both of his, "if you do not know me better than to believe the falsehood that I am a gambler; if you cannot from your heart acquit me of that, I will not ask you to love me! I will not plead for your affection, unless I have your esteem!"

"You have," said she, very softly; she could resist no longer. What woman could combat the assurances of one she had known and loved from childhood, as Flora had known Astley?

"Both! Only say I may have both!"

“Both, Astley! I believe you true, and I—” Her blushing, smiling, tearful look, spoke the words she did not utter; but they spoke eloquently to her lover, and told him precious truths. His gratitude and delight must be imagined.

“It is with my father’s consent that I am here,” said he. “It is with his perfect knowledge and full permission, that I came down to put an end to these cruel doubts and harrowing fears. Your letter to him, so affectionately and generously trustful of me, Miss Grant’s insinuations, Clarke’s account of your unhappiness, and the charges which were brought against me, all joined to make me wild to come to you at once; and your uncle, with his accustomed goodness, yielded to my entreaties and expostulations. So I came.”

“But, Astley, why this disguise; why not come openly to the house as you used to do. I cannot help thinking that what is clandestine must be wrong,” said Flora.

“It was necessary, dearest; and for my sake

I must ask you not to reveal my visit for two days—only two days—and then all will reveal itself. The reason you shall know then, when all disguise ceases ; when I may—tell me only that I may—claim my own dear, early play-fellow, sister, friend, everything loveable and lovely, as my beautiful bride. When I ask your mother's consent to our union, you will not withhold yours ?”

“No, Astley, when my mother has consented, I will agree too ; but why, then, tell me why you told your uncle you did not love me, and did not wish for my hand ?”

“I knew they would tell you that—not that I ever said I did not love you ! I never uttered such a falsehood ; but I said I did not aspire to your hand, because my father had always protested against my doing so, until you ceased to be his ward. Then he said—but what is Hamilton coming to interrupt us for ?”

“Ah ! there's a great splashing drop of rain,” cried Flora, starting up, blushing, and trying to look quite innocent, and not at all ashamed

of the proximity in which Astley was sitting to her. Hamilton exclaimed abruptly—

“I am sorry to interrupt you, Miss Denys, but in five minutes more you will be wet to the skin. There is a storm coming up from the eastward which will drench us through.”

They both looked round, and saw symptoms of the torrent he predicted.

“And we are so far from home,” said Flora, somewhat dismayed.

“There is no time to be wasted in deliberation; we must see if we can gain that cottage on the west side of the hill, where we can get shelter,” said Hamilton, and taking Flora’s arm under his, he strode on hastily to put his plan in execution. They were very near the top, and a few yards more brought them to the summit. Down below, close to their path, lay the cottage he spoke of, a long, low building, in its garden taken from the green down, occupying the bottom of a narrow ravine, with a bright, but tiny stream, dancing down the hill side, and skirting the fence.

On each side the bank rose steep and high, scattered over with large stones and rocks, apparently arrested whilst in the act of falling, and down amongst these—here, in a succession of footsteps; there, in an abrupt and slippery bank, covered with short turf, withered, and brown; and then, again, over hard ledges of the sharp, bare rock, projecting rough and angular through the green sward—wound their somewhat difficult and uncertain path.

It was a race against the storm, in which they were nearly beaten. Drop after drop plashed down on their faces, or instantaneously soaked through Flora's muslin gown and mantle, as, with the assistance of the gentlemen, she sprang down the rough path—sometimes one, sometimes the other, lending her his supporting hand.

Heated, breathless, and laughing, and with all their haste rather wet, they gained the cottage garden, and pausing at the first open door, requested shelter from the storm. This was readily granted by a tidy woman who was

inside ; when Flora and Mr. Hamilton entered the room, whilst Astley, remembering his disguise, paused on the threshold, as if not considering himself on an equal footing with the others. The mistress of the mansion, however, bade him enter and be welcome, if so be, as the gentleman and lady would not mind ; to which Hamilton gravely answered, that he could have no possible objection, and Flora, behind her bonnet, laughed at the idea.

After setting chairs for the gentry, and recommending the other to find a seat, the good-woman stirred the small turf fire, over which a kettle was hissing, and then left the cottage, probably to enjoy a gossip with her next door neighbour.

Flora stood by the fire, and dried her dress, whilst she amused herself with contemplating the ornaments and furniture of the cottage. Astley drew close up to her.

“ I wonder how one would feel living in such a place as this,” said she, looking round at the smoke-stained ceiling ; the somewhat dilapidated

plastering on the walls ; the dresser with its bright-coloured tea-tray, row of willow-pattern plates, blue-and-orange tea-cups, and great mug full of flowers ; the plain Windsor chairs ; the deal table polished by use ; the uneven brick floor ; and the narrow latticed window. " If circumstances were to bring me to such a position, I wonder whether I could bear it, Astley. How should you like it ? "

" Not much ; but with you, it would be better than wealth without you. I would rather keep in the sphere to which we are accustomed, but if you were forced to quit it, I would not stay behind. "

She smiled, and told him it was well he was not likely to be taken at his word, and then added :

" I want to know why I was born as I am ? what have I ever done, or what am I likely to do, that I should have all the blessings of life so thickly showered upon me ? whilst who knows what cares, sorrows, wants, privations these cottage walls have seen—how much misery perhaps

that poor woman who just left us has endured. Tell me why is this, Astley?"

"I cannot tell you why it is, Flora; but you know that if your advantages are greater, so the account at last will be the stricter; you know what is demanded of those to whom much is given. You have heavy responsibilities, I admit," said Astley, thoughtfully.

"Responsibilities, yes; I have never thought enough about them, and when they have occurred to my mind, it was only with a wish that I could shake them off. Yet, I suppose that would not be wise, even were it possible."

"About as wise as to put out your eyes, or stop your ears for ever, that you might not have to answer for the use of your senses. The risk is the greater, the trial the more severe; but then we know that the aids are in proportion, and the result, if successful, the more blessed. We have no right to throw aside the burden to which we are born, that we may appropriate our strength to our own selfish ends and purposes."

"I have thought a great deal lately, Astley, and I think I see, that wealth was not given me for my own luxurious pleasures, and that even in spending my income, I may yet keep myself poor. I made a great many good resolutions not to be selfish and self-indulgent, but to work for the benefit of others, though I did not know very well how I was to manage it. I hope I shall not forget them all now."

"I hope not, Flora; for nothing could be a greater misfortune to you. I think you are right so far in your idea of keeping yourself poor, if you mean practising self-denial, resisting the temptations to finery and expense in clothing, furniture, useless ornaments, and those sort of indulgences. Remember the wise rule, 'Have what your rank requires, not what it only permits;' was not that the decision of M. de St. Cyran? The 'claims of society' and 'what is expected of one,' are made the excuses for too much lavish expenditure; many a drawing-room glitters with gilding, pier-glasses, marble and china, till one can hardly turn round, whilst

the church close by is ragged, shabby, and damp-stained, or is perhaps wanting altogether ; and the cottages in the vicinity are little better than tolerable pigsties."

"How is the rain getting on," continued Astley, after a short pause, and they both joined Hamilton, who stood looking out at the door.

The rain had not increased much ; sometimes falling quickly for a minute, then ceasing for a brief space ; the clouds, however, were still more threatening than before. Huge flat masses of a lurid blue, with strange white edges, seemed heaped up on the horizon, and pressed down forcibly on one another. Here and there the solid body was riven by some deep fissure, which showed dark and wild, like a black cavern on a mountain side. The deadly stillness of the air was only broken by the pattering drops which fell tinkling on the paving stones, or by the murmur of the little brook beside them.

"We shall certainly have a terrible storm," said Hamilton, "it has been brewing for hours ;

I saw all the cows were lying down this afternoon; there is no surer sign of rain; and the swallows have been skimming the ground all day!"

As he spoke, there came from the clouds above, where the livid blue was the deepest and most unnatural in hue, one dazzling flash of lightning, white in its excessive brightness, a long, narrow, distinct streak of light, cleaving the clouds and falling perpendicularly to the earth, apparently but a short distance from them.

Before either of the three had time for more than a single exclamation, came the thunder, which drowned all other sounds: a rattling, clattering, crackling roar, shaking the walls of the cottage, and causing the inmates to glance up fearfully at the roof, which seemed about to fall upon their heads. Such, indeed, was the terrific crash, that they could hardly persuade themselves that some huge rock had not been thrown down close beside them, and they listened in suspense as the sound rolled away along the hill, dying on one side only to be echoed back from another, caught up by height after height, and

returned to the clouds, which in their turn re-echoed the report, and sent it back to the earth.

Hardly had the last murmur died away, when the storm burst on them in all its fury ; the wind swept wildly along the hill side, torrents of rain dashed upon the earth, the lightning, blue, pink, and white, played and quivered around them almost incessantly, seen all the more distinctly for the great and sudden darkness, whilst above, roaring wind, and pelting hail and rain, rolled the loudest and most prolonged thunder, never pausing in its tremendous voice ; long before one peal had worn itself out in distant reverberations, another and another crash succeeded, until the whole atmosphere seemed one chaos of struggling elements, and contending sounds. The very air appeared on fire with the electric fluid ; and the eyeballs were pained and wearied with the perpetual shrinking from the dazzling light, whilst the heat and heaviness of the atmosphere were almost suffocating.

Flora clasped Astley's hand very close, but

did not otherwise betray much fear or weakness, watching even with a sort of delight the grand and majestic display of Almighty Power ; though the gentlemen more aware of the danger in a storm, where the clouds were directly discharging their superfluous electricity to the earth, each felt considerable uneasiness.

They wanted her to come back from the door, where she was standing to watch the progress of the storm ; but for a long while they urged in vain. However, on the wind shifting round a little, so as to drive the rain in on the cottage floor, she did retreat, and allowed the half-door to be closed to keep it out.

Little was said by any of the party. They could not converse under such circumstances ; and all the questions, explanations, and promises which Flora had intended either to ask or make, were swept from her mind by the uproar of the elements.

Gradually, the lightning became fainter and less frequent, the thunder paused longer between each peal, and the wind died away in the distance,

although a heavy, pouring rain seemed to have settled in for the evening. It was getting late, and Hamilton said :

“Boyle, yon ought to go.”

“What ! and leave Flora here, with no means of getting home without being perfectly wet through. No, we must first invent some way of getting her home safe,” said he, indignantly.

Hamilton smiled benevolently at what he considered a lover’s excuse for lingering, and replied quietly :

“I do not see that you can do her any good, and your object ought to be to catch the mail-train to town to-night, to save time.”

“I shall have plenty of time, if I am at Spetchley by half-past seven ; I shall drive in from Mathon as soon as I leave you ; but first I must run down to the inn, and fetch my Mackintosh, in which Flora can walk home.”

“It is almost six now,” said Hamilton, “and it is more than an hour and a half’s drive, even if you have your conveyance ready ; so you must not attempt to come back. Send it up

by some one, or I will go down too, and bring it back."

"What! and leave her quite alone! No, Hamilton, if you go, I shall stay with her."

"Obstinate fellow! Miss Denys, do oblige him to be reasonable."

"Quite out of my power. Dear Astley, do not mind me; send me up the cloak, and say no more about it, but bid me good-bye now."

"I cannot say good-bye now, Flora; at least, it will be for a very brief period. Thursday, at latest, we meet again. Take care of her, Hamilton. I must trust her to you."

And squeezing both her hands in his, with a warmth which spoke his feelings, he dashed out of the cottage, and hurried down the bank. Flora sat still, and quietly turning her face to the window, indulged in a low, smothered fit of weeping, which greatly relieved her heart, and composed her feelings.

Hamilton watched her with interest. He knew something about young ladies, however,

and did not interfere, until he saw her growing rather more calm, and then he observed :

“Astley is looking very well ; travelling and running about seem to agree with him, and he is in great spirits.”

“You are very good-natured to me, Mr. Hamilton,” said Flora, smiling away her last tears, “and I am afraid I am rather a bore.”

“No ; I should hope I did not think you so. You will be better after this I am sure.”

“How came you to learn such toleration for a young lady’s weaknesses ?” enquired she.

“From my sisters,” was his reply.

“You have sisters,” said she, interrogatively. “Where are they ?”

“At rest,” replied he, gravely ; “I trust in peace. They were taken from me years ago.”

He fell into a reverie, and they were both silent. He was probably musing on days long gone by, when he had been blessed with those on whose regard he had a claim, and to whom his protection was due of right, and not of courtesy or benevolence. Then he had been

useful to others, and happy in himself, without effort, and almost without consciousness. Now he had to exert himself to seek occasions of being obliging ; and unless he would live like a snail in his shell, to go out of his way to do good to his fellow creatures, and make all his acquaintance the objects of his philanthropy. It is well for the world that there are such men, who, having no immediate ties to restrict their sympathies, can diffuse them wider and wider as necessity or grief require it. It is better for the individuals themselves, who learn thus to direct their energies, and make the sorrows which they may have undergone, and the privations they have endured, a never-failing source of kind feeling to others.

Flora, meanwhile, was meditating on what had just passed, and reviewing the conduct and language of her lover, when the silence was interrupted by the sound of hasty footsteps approaching up the path, and with hurried pace Astley re-entered the cottage.

Before Mr. Hamilton could blame him for

his imprudence, or Flora exclaim more than half a sentence, he said, "There, I have brought it myself. Nobody would attend to me at the inn, and I could not make sure it would be sent ; but here is the Mackintosh. Let me put it round you, Flora." Whilst he was fastening it round her neck, their companion amused himself by exclaiming at this preposterous waste of time ; he would certainly be too late for the train to Birmingham ; to all which, with his face bent down to inspect and set right the apparently troublesome hooks of the cape under Flora's chin, Astley seemed to pay no more heed than to the rain-drops, which trickled from his frock, or hung on his broad-brimmed hat.

As soon as the process was completed, Hamilton took Flora's hand, and said :

"Come, Miss Denys, come away, or this foolish fellow will never start !"

"I shall be off before you are at the top of the hill ; my conveyance will be ready by the time I get down again, and then I shall go."

"You are so wet, Astley," said Flora, passing her hand over his sleeve.

"Oh, I shall pull off this rag, and put on a good substantial great coat, and do well enough. Good-bye, dearest, and do not forget or doubt me again."

He darted off down the path to the inn at the foot of the hill, whilst Flora stood for a few minutes to watch him, then turning to her conductor, who was patiently waiting her pleasure, she said with a very sweet smile :

"What a thoughtless thing to do ! Here I am keeping you in the rain, Mr. Hamilton. I really beg your pardon. Let us go on."

To surmount the path, down which she had so lightly sprung, was no such easy matter. Although the rain was slackening a little, it was still unceasing. Each bent, each bush of furze, each thistle was laden with drops. The foot-steps hollowed in the bank were now only small recesses of muddy water ; and the rocks were slippery. In spite of Flora's active habits, and early training, she would more than once have

fallen in that steep ascent, but for the strong arm which held her up, and which seemed to feel her weight as too trifling to be noticed.

At length, however, the summit was gained, and Flora found breath to pity Mr. Hamilton's wet condition, from whose grey shooting-jacket the rain drops slowly trickled down. He was very indifferent on the subject, and dismissed it by simply saying, he was used to be wet.

"And now tell me, please," cried she eagerly, as the sight of the spot where she had sat with Astley gave a turn to her ideas, "how came he here, and how did you know, and all about it? It is all a mystery to me still!"

"It is pretty much the same to me, Miss Denys; but I received a note this morning from your cousin, to ask me to meet him at the inn at Mathon, which I did. He came down on business, to see somebody who was not here, as well as to see you; and I think he ought to have gone back before this, but he was so earnest to see you, that I was obliged to promise to get you out here; your absence from dinner puzzled

me sadly, and I was thinking of sending you a message, trying to invent some excuse for asking for an interview, when I luckily met you. I was quite at my wit's end till then, for I have no invention whatever, and could think of nothing which would not excite suspicion, or make you wonder. Astley could not have chosen a worse confederate. And now a pretty mess I have led you into. Much credit you will do to my care and judgment."

"Yes; as if it were your fault. But Mr. Hamilton, how uneasy my mother will be!"

"So I was thinking, but knew it would be no use putting it into your head. However, it will soon be over now; you are a capital walker. On the whole, I hope you do not regret the expedition!"

"Not much," replied she, with a demure subdued smile. "My bonnet ribands will be of less value to my maid, that is the worst of it. I wonder what Astley is here for."

"I hope, Miss Denys," said he, making a full stop to face her, "that you fully and entirely

understand that this interview must be a complete secret from every one ; no exceptions in favour of particular friends ; not a single whisper to any individual in the house, or you will ruin Astley completely."

" Perfectly," replied she, " I am under a promise to that effect to Astley. Suppose we were to walk on."

They did so ; and at their rapid pace soon reached home.

Mrs. Denys was, of course, in a terrible fright about Flora, when the storm came on, but as no one else knew of her *sortie*, nobody else had been at all concerned for her, and she reached her own room, wet, draggled, and a little out of breath ; but glowing with happiness, and her head-ache completely cured. She did not know when she had lost it.

She soon quieted her mother's alarm, for causing which she was duly sorry, assuring her that she had been in no danger, and having met with Mr. Hamilton on the way, had taken shelter with him in a cottage. The dripping

Mackintosh told no tales, for he had conveyed it to his own room, although Flora would gladly have retained it as a pledge of Astley's good will, and an anticipation of his return. But it is time we should explain his sudden appearance, and account for the lengthened silence which had preceded it.

CHAPTER VI.

Who swerves from innocence, who makes divorce
Of that serene companion, a good name,
Recovers not his loss ; but walks with shame,
With doubt, with fear, and haply with remorse !

WORDSWORTH.

THE feelings of Astley Boyle when he quitted Malvern, were not exactly such as his uncle and Miss Grant believed them to be. He was neither miserable nor desperate ; he was very much perplexed, it is true ; bewildered in a labyrinth of doubts, and his imagination was wandering from one subject of wonder to another, but he was very far from hopeless as concerned Flora, and not by any means unhappy regarding himself. The communication which he had with Mr. Allen had given so sudden a turn to

his ideas, that more than twenty-four hours might well be required to arrange and compose them in due order.

It was a startling, puzzling notion that the lawyer had suggested to him, but one which appeared more probable as he reflected on it. It had been nothing less than a doubt as to the actual identity of the individual who called himself Mr. Boyle!

At the first hint, Astley had been incredulous as to any imposition; but when Mr. Allen demanded of him the proofs that the person in question had adduced, they amounted only to the possession of letters and papers, and, in fact, all the property which his uncle was bringing home, and his own assertions that he was John Boyle.

To set against this, were several things; an occasional ignorance of what good manners required, which seemed incompatible with the habits and feelings of a gentleman; the entire change in his plans and intentions since his return to England, demonstrated in abandoning

his long-cherished dreams of settling in his native country, and recovering the family property and ancient importance; the sudden reserve and mystery in which he had enveloped all his proceedings since his arrival at home; and the utter indifference with which he evidently regarded his nephew; an indifference as causeless as it was contrary to his former professions and repeated promises.

All this seemed unaccountable and inexplicable; hardly, indeed, more surprising than that some bold swindler had obtained possession of the property, and assumed the name of the still-absent uncle, Mr. John Boyle.

But if this were so, what was become of him? Had there been foul play? Astley shrank from the idea. Had his uncle been robbed at the Cape? and might he not now be lingering on there, in distress and sickness, whilst his name was used to cover forgery and fraud? Or was he really no more? and had the pretender who had presented himself been assured that the lawful owner of the fortune which he claimed,

would never rise again from the grave, or the ocean, to prove the wrong, and see justice done to the nephew.

This had been Mr. Allen's persuasion ; and though the notion at first seemed wild and startling, it was by no means so contrary to probabilities as to be rejected at once, and very far indeed from impossible.

Tossed about by innumerable doubts and fears, hopes and suspicions, most anxious to prove that the very unpleasant and disreputable individual who claimed to be his uncle was of no kin to him ; eager to save the property from the grasp of a swindler, and grieving at the idea of having lost one whom he had always loved in fancy, and longed to know personally ; Astley vacillated between one set of feelings and another all the way to London. He had no very clear notion of what he was to do, or how he should proceed when he did reach home ; and the most prominent sentiment—the one that recurred oftenest, and held strongest possession of his mind, was that if his uncle was really deceased,

his property ought to descend to his nephew ; that, in this case, he believed he should be richer than Flora Denys, and that her guardian would probably withdraw his prohibition, and allow him to speak his feelings, and learn hers, without delay.

Flora was the first and last of his thoughts ; and when sleep overtook him in the railway, Flora filled his dreams, mixed up with all the wild vagaries and strange inconsistencies to which his position, the motion, and the noise around him, would naturally give rise. He arrived at his step-father's house in due time, but without any diminution of his anxious uncertainty. He found Mr. Frank Denys in a state of evident uneasiness which immediately caught his attention, although, to say the truth, that gentleman was so often nervous and excited about small matters, that, but for Astley's own train of thought, he would not have noticed this now.

"I am so glad you are come, Astley," said Mr. Denys. "I wanted you sadly ; I don't in the least know what to do."

"What is the matter, Sir?" enquired the young man, somewhat eagerly.

"I cannot exactly tell; but I have heard something which puzzles and surprises me very much. The day I wrote to you, I heard at the club—; but, by-the-bye, what do you think of your uncle now?"

"Was it anything about him?" exclaimed Astley, with quickness. "What have you heard?"

"Why, it was so odd—but you must judge whether it is true or not. But, Astley, I heard that your real uncle died at the Cape."

Astley started up. "How—when?—who said so, Sir?" Then reseating himself, for he knew that to hurry Mr. Denys would perplex and annoy him, he endeavoured to quiet his emotion, and smother his impatience. "Pray tell me about it."

"Do you remember Thelwall, Fred. Thelwall, who was at school with you?"

"Yes, he went into the army—what of him?" said poor Astley, in an agony of suspense.

"He is just come back from the Cape," said the other. "I met his father at the club, and he told me so."

A faint light began to dawn on the listener's mind.

"Perhaps, Sir, he saw my uncle there," said he.

"Well, I don't know about that, the thing is this. The other day, I met Archy Thelwall, as I say. 'Well,' says he to me, 'your son-in-law has stepped into a pretty fortune, I suppose. We shall soon hear more of him, I dare say.' As you may suppose, I was a good deal surprised. 'Fortune,' said I, 'not that I know of.' And thinking he meant something quite different, I said, 'he is down with my ward at Malvern now; but you must think nothing of that.'"

Astley moved restlessly, and had considerable difficulty in suppressing an entreaty that his father-in-law would go on to the main topic. However, he knew of old, Mr. Denys was not to be hurried, and that, consequently, the best course was to be quiet, at all events, and patient, if possible.

“‘I don’t mean that,’ says my friend, ‘though,’ says he, ‘I would lay a good wager that the hand of your pretty heiress will be his next acquisition. But what I mean, is his uncle’s money. Does he not have that?’ ‘His uncle,’ said I, ‘keeps his money to himself at present; and whatever he may do hereafter, I fancy, from what I hear from my boy, he and his thousands will not part company at present.’ ‘Why man!’ says Archy, ‘he can’t take them out of the world with him.’ ‘No,’ says I, ‘but he has not gone from it yet himself—he is at Malvern!’ ‘Malvern,’ cries Thelwall, all aghast, ‘why Fred. told me he had died at the Cape. I believe he went to the funeral himself.’ You may suppose how this startled me. ‘He came home,’ said I, ‘about three weeks ago.’ ‘Well, I suppose you know best,’ replies Thelwall; ‘but it is odd enough if Fred. has made such a mistake, for he says he remembered directly that the old gentleman was Astley Boyle’s uncle, and thought how lucky he was to come into such a property. I am as sure as that I sit here he said he was dead; and my impression is, he went to the funeral.’”

"Where is Fred. Thelwall?" cried Astley, starting up eagerly. "If he spreads this report he may ruin all. I must see him at once, if possible."

"But, Astley, do you believe it?" exclaimed Mr. Denys, astonished.

"Yes; I have no doubt it is true. If we can only prove it, all will be right," replied Astley; "but it will not do to go spreading the report about, indiscriminately."

"You believe it," repeated Mr. Denys, every moment becoming more mystified. "But then who is this man? How came he with all the papers? What will become of him and the money? What is he? Have we been all deceived?"

"Yes; I fancy so, pretty much. He is, to all appearance, a swindler; and after all, my poor uncle is dead. I am very sorry, poor old man. I should so have liked to have seen him."

Astley fell into a reverie, and Mr. Denys tried to arrange his ideas.

"At all events," said he, at last, by way of

consoling Astley, who he saw was grieving for his uncle, "if he is dead, his money must be all yours."

"I would rather have had my real uncle—the only blood relation left me in the world; but then it is a comfort that the fellow at Malvern should have no claim on me. I have blushed to own him as a relative. It is better to respect his memory than abhor his presence."

"True; but suppose it is all a false alarm, and that this should be the real man after all. What will you do then? He will never forgive you for having suspected him."

"Of course not," said Astley. "But he must never know it, until we have the proofs."

"And how are you to get those, Astley. I don't see; all the proofs are on the other side."

"I wonder how much money he has drawn," continued Astley, not much attending to his father's puzzles. "Has he sold out any of the funded property? He said he meant to go to America—naturally enough, it was the safest

way. I suspect his wedding tour would be of some duration. I see it all now."

"He cannot have sold out, you know," replied Mr. Denys. "The books are closed at the Bank for the payment of the dividend; they were when he first went there, and he cannot transfer any Stock for more than a fortnight."

"And the first thing we must do," resumed Astley, "is to give a quiet hint to the bankers, to mind what they are about. Mr. Allen told me that."

"But I introduced him at Messrs. C—myself," objected Mr. Denys. "It will look so odd to go and say, I don't know who he is now."

"I do not think it can be helped now, my dear Sir; we must put them on their guard at once. I wonder whether what he has done will amount to downright forgery. I believe it must. Did he not sign a Power of Attorney for the sale of Stock?"

"I daresay he did; I am sure I hope I shall not get into any scrape," said Mr. Denys, thoroughly uncomfortable. "You don't think my

having introduced him will bring me into mischief—do you, Astley? They will not think I am his confederate I trust.”

Astley had the greatest difficulty in reassuring his step-father, who, in his nervous way, was always extremely unwilling to enter on any business connected with lawyers, having a superstitious dread that he should be thereby in imminent danger of utter ruin. Fortunately, although he was one of those persons who never make up their own minds, he did not object to having it done for him. Indeed, he had always been accustomed to lean on his step-son’s judgment, since the latter had been old enough to form one, so that, in the present case, he yielded, as usual, to his advice.

As soon as breakfast was finished they started for the city, Astley being resolute in his determination to see the bankers, who had always acted as his uncle’s agents during his residence abroad, and prevent any further advances being made to the claimant at Malvern, until matters were entirely cleared up.

"This is an awkward business, gentlemen," said the partner to whom they were speaking, when Astley as clearly and succinctly as possible had stated the case. "A very awkward business, indeed. I am certain my partner will be as much surprised and concerned as myself. Trusting to your introduction, Mr. Denys, we have made considerable advances to the person in question. It is most unfortunate that such a deception should have occurred."

"Indeed it is not my fault," exclaimed poor Mr. Denys, in great trepidation, "I had never a suspicion that all was not right; he talked so, and he had Astley's picture, and all the letters, and knew everything and everybody he ought to know. I could not help it."

"No doubt, my dear Sir, he must be a clever fellow. So poor Mr. John Boyle is really dead, is he. Poor man! he was an excellent old gentleman, and leaves I should guess a good hundred thousand pounds in mortgages and funded property. A most respectable party he was."

"His death," said Astley, "is not quite oer-

tain ; but I have no doubt in my own mind that the individual claiming his name is a swindler and impostor."

"It is a clear case of forgery," pursued the banker, "if we can only prove it ; and I suppose, Sir, if the case turns out as you imagine, and your respected uncle is no more, the property all devolves upon you. A very fine inheritance upon my honour !"

"What is to be done?" said Astley, "what are the first steps to take?"

"I apprehend secresy and discretion are the most needful," replied the banker, "but we will see our legal adviser in such matters. May I ask the name and address of your solicitor, Mr. Astley Boyle, or shall we recommend you to employ our agent, as our interests are the same in this case?"

Astley gave him Mr. Allen's address, having determined to put the affair so far as he was concerned, in his hands, adding that he believed the gentleman in question would be in town almost immediately.

Having discussed the business in every way, they took their leave, Mr. Frank Denys considerably relieved by finding that he was none the worse for the undertaking.

Astley's energy and sense did not fail him ; he had now fairly entered on the business, and his perceptions of the necessary steps became clearer. As he had taken the first, it opened the view to the second also. He was working with an object calculated to inspire him. Success was wealth, and wealth was Flora. With such a prospect he was ready not merely to put his shoulder to the wheel ; but to fling himself with all the impetus which warmth and eagerness could give, on that particular point which could most facilitate his work.

Having safely deposited his father at home, he resolved next to try and see Mr. Thelwall, senior, and, if possible, prevent any mischief by incautious observations in that quarter. The son he had learnt from Mr. Denys, was gone to Scotland, and he earnestly hoped that no accidental circumstance would carry a hint of this story

to the vicinity of Malvern, and so give the premature warning which Mr. Allen so greatly deprecated.

Mr. Thelwall himself began the subject.

"So I find, Mr. Boyle, I reckoned without my host, when I fancied you an inheritor of a large fortune just now."

"Exactly, Sir. I am no richer than I was when last I saw you," replied Astley.

"And your uncle is staying at Malvern, is he. However, I suppose some day you will be the better for his thousands."

"I should be sorry to have such expectations made a subject of discussion," replied Astley; "it might bring on serious mischief between him and me. You would greatly oblige me by caution as to what you say about him. Where is Fred, Sir?"

"Visiting his aunt, near Aberdeen, Boyle. There's his address; are you thinking of writing to him? I am sure he would be glad to hear from you!"

"Well, perhaps I may. And you will oblige

me by not repeating that report about my uncle's death. He is a whimsical person, that gentleman at Malvern, and it might do me a world of mischief, if it came to his ears."

Mr. Thelwall nodded, smiled, and promised, and Astley went home.

To his great joy, Mr. Allen came to him in the evening. Though he had arrived in London only late in the afternoon, he had already taken such measures in Astley's cause, as to have arranged a conference with the solicitor to the Bank of England, and the legal advisers of Messrs. C— and Co., for the next day. He came to give Astley notice, and to beg him to be present. The report of Mr. Boyle's death was news to him.

"If we could only substantiate that," exclaimed he, "we should have no need to look further. A dead man cannot sign his name, and the case of forgery would be as clear as the day."

"True ; but Mr. Thelwell himself so readily gave up the idea, that I cannot help thinking

that the information he received was not very precise, and I am afraid it may melt away, as such reports do, into mere hearsay."

"Possibly. I have no doubt, however, of its truth, whether the gentleman in question can prove it or not. One of our first objects must be to get hold of him."

"I saw that," said Astley, "and got his address from his father, thinking of going down after him myself; it would be so much quicker than a letter."

"Right; we will see about that to-morrow. I wish Mr. Denys were not so fidgetty." That gentleman had left the room about five minutes previously, but not before Mr. Allen had discovered how nervous and uneasy he was.

"He takes it so to heart," said Astley, "but it is his way. He makes himself very unhappy, but he does no harm. He is very safe."

"I hope he is." But it was quite evident that the lawyer would much rather that so nervous a gentleman should have had nothing to do with the business.

The conference took place the next day as determined. There was a good deal to be decided, and some difficulties in their way. When all the details had been put together, which in any way bore on the character of the self-styled Mr. Boyle, they presented a suspicious case, but there was no actual evidence to justify any decisive measures.

Little things, which at the time had been hardly noticed, now became important links in the chain of circumstantial evidence. His signature was carefully examined and criticised, and they thought they could discover a certain stiffness and formality which his former writing had not shown. It was like, certainly—like enough not to give rise to suspicion—and yet now that the suspicion was awakened, there was a something which seemed to strengthen it.

The facts which had first aroused Mr. Allen's attention, each small in itself, added weight to the scale. The bankers well remembered the annoyance and vexation he had testified, when

he had found, on his first interview with them, that the money invested in the Three per Cents. was for the present not available. He had wished to have it all sold out immediately ; stating, as a reason, his desire to invest it in more remunerative ways.

His manner of apologising, as it were, for doing what nobody would have thought of questioning, was now remembered, and dwelt on ; and his irritation when he found delay inevitable was intelligible enough, under circumstances which rendered every day an additional risk, although it seemed unreasonable and disproportioned to the evil, where a trifling postponement alone was in question.

But suspicions alone, however strong, were not enough for their present purpose. Some positive proof must be procured before they could venture to take any measures against his liberty, or his character ; for they had before them the risk of error, and the consequences might be actions for false imprisonment, defamation, and such disagreeables to the parties

concerned, if they failed in substantiating their accusation.

Neither Mr. Denys nor Astley Boyle could afford any clue towards identifying the supposed impostor. There were none of their acquaintance, so far as they knew, who had ever seen the real individual, and they were only able to give a very general idea of his habits and character, whilst of his person they had already shown they knew nothing.

Whatever was to be done must be done quickly, secretly, and with judgment; if he suspected suspicion, he would probably be off immediately, and although they might in some measure guard against this by prudent precautions, yet whilst so many facilities for escape existed, it was best not to provoke or frighten him into attempting them.

Astley, eager and energetic, wished to take a large share of the active exertions upon himself; it would be much easier to be doing something, than to be patient in idleness; his only desire was to be employed. He would go any-

where to discover the necessary witnesses, he was ready to start immediately for any corner of the kingdom ; only let them settle what he should undertake, and he would show them what he could do in such a cause. The lawyers were not surprised at his enthusiasm ; but they did not know the motive ; they thought it was natural when a large fortune was at stake, and talked of his chances of succession. He thought of another species of success ; one to which wealth was only the stepping-stone.

The first thing they settled on doing, was to see the owners of the 'Northern Queen,' and ascertain what passengers, besides Mr. John Boyle, embarked in this vessel, on her voyage from Sydney. Some one of these, they might, perhaps, succeed in confronting with the impostor, and so settle the matter at once. In the meantime, Astley, whose object must indisputably be, to ascertain the facts relative to his uncle's decease, was recommended to go down at once to Aberdeenshire, and learn all he could from Mr. Frederick Thelwall on that

subject. To make the necessary preparations for this journey, communicate his intentions to his father-in-law, and settle what his best plans would be, Astley returned home at once, leaving Mr. Allen to pursue the investigations in the City, relative to the owners of the 'Northern Queen,' and all the questions connected therewith.

The solicitor was to bring him word in the course of the afternoon, if there was anything discovered which could be of use in his search.

During his solitary return to Brooke Street, Astley entertained himself with many profound reflections on the matters before him. He saw how unpleasant and embarrassing a circumstance it would prove to Louisa Grant, should she actually marry this man to whom she was now engaged; and he sincerely hoped to be able to prevent this catastrophe.

Certainly Louisa did not deserve much pity from him, or any one; she had been caught in her own snare; and although Astley did not know half the mischief she had already attempted, and much less suspected what she was now

meditating, he knew enough to make him inclined to dislike her. But this dislike could not prevent his being sorry for her mortification and impending disappointment, although he could do nothing whatever to avert it, except hurry his own measures as much as possible, in order to prevent her involving herself in so very discreditable and painful a way.

She had talked of marrying in rather less than three weeks ; that then, he supposed, was the utmost he should have for tracing out reports, discovering witnesses, and finally, acting on the result of their discoveries.

Of what might be taking place at Malvern, he did not trust himself to think. His only idea now was to act ; to act boldly and vigorously, and leave the future for the present. To trust and go forward, that was what Mrs. Newton had told him ; and when in addition to his present hopes, he had the memory of Flora's kind words on Sunday evening, and her look of regret when he announced his departure on Monday, he believed that he had quite encour-

agement enough to support any reasonable man under the prospect of a fortnight's absence, with such an object in view, and such a termination in prospect.

Mr. Frank Denys was very willing to promise Astley any amount of prudence he might require; he was to say nothing about his uncle, nothing of his absence, and, in fact, to avoid his name as much as possible.

"And if I succeed, Sir," said Astley, anxious to come to a positive understanding, "you will not continue the objection you made to my asking—I mean my speaking to—to Flora—I mean you will not think it necessary to refuse your consent."

"No—no, Astley; if you succeed, you will be much more than her equal in money-matters, and then you may wed her if she will have you. But no one shall ever say that I provided for my wife's portionless son, by giving him the hand of my ward, before she was old enough to know her own mind. If you fail, you must wait, as I have always said, till she is of age; then

she may judge for herself, and whether she accept or refuse you, my conscience will be clear. I wish you success with all my heart. It is hard if such a fine young fellow as you, should be disinherited by a disagreeable capricious old uncle ; and still more so, if that same uncle is under ground, that you should be kept out of your own, by a swindling impostor. But you will succeed I am sure, that's my comfort."

CHAPTER VII.

Little Bo-peep has lost her sheep,
And can't tell where to find them.
Let them alone, they'll all come home
Swinging their tails behind them.

THE enquiries and investigations as to the passengers in the "Northern Queen," did not produce anything so satisfactory as Mr. Allen had hoped. By a most unfortunate chance, there was no clue afforded to the present residence of any of them. Their number, too, had been few. There was Mr. John Boyle, merchant, of Sydney, and his servant; Mr. Harris and child, a Mr. Walter Long, who was returning from India, by the way of Australia, and a Dutch merchant and his wife, who were ultimately

bound for Amsterdam. London had been the first destination of all these individuals; but London is a wide place, and to find out the present whereabouts of any one with only the fact that he had been in London four months previously to guide inquiry, did not seem a very easy task. Little as there was to help them, however, Mr. Allen would not doubt as to the result; individuals had been traced out under greater disadvantages than that; and there was one point which they had ascertained which was of importance: the captain of the "Northern Queen" during that voyage, was believed to be in England at this time. He was to have sailed again last month, but a serious accident had laid him up for a time, and though the ship-owners could not say at that moment where he might be, they had means of finding out, which would soon produce him.

Astley's plans were now definitively settled. He was to go down by mail-train to Aberdeen, and from thence, as quickly as he could to his friend's present residence, which was said to be

about an hour's drive from the town. Thanks to the facilities of railroads, even then existing, Astley found himself at Aberdeen on Thursday evening, but he found himself also so exceedingly weary with his long night journey, and all the preceding excitement, worry and anxiety, that he concluded it would be most advisable to take a good night's rest, before he proceeded any further in his investigations ; so consigning all his cares, and all his hopes to the oblivion of sleep, he spent in profound repose, those hours which Flora employed perhaps in pensive regrets for his absence, or perhaps in dancing polkas with Mr. Norman Grant.

He had no difficulty in discovering his former school-fellow on the succeeding morning ; and although his appearance was extremely unexpected, it could not be said to be unwelcome. It was a pouring wet day ; and under such circumstances, the arrival of a young and interesting-looking stranger at a country-house where the same family party have been for two days much confined by rain, is an event

which is likely to give rise to pleasant variety of feeling, and possible interest and amusement.

Astley found Mr. Frederick Thelwall lounging in a drawing-room between two pretty and agreeable-looking young ladies, whose embroidery and painting he might be supposed to be superintending. He certainly had expected when he inquired for the gentleman alone, that he should have secured a private interview, as a matter of course ; but as neither of the party seemed to contemplate moving, he was obliged after some desultory remarks on the weather, and some rather vague answers as to his present route, and his reasons for being in Scotland at all, to request the favour of ten minutes audience on a matter of business.

The information which he derived from his journey was, after all, by no means such as to throw much light on the past ; and it was only when he discovered that there was really no decisive intelligence to be gained, that he found out how much he had been depending on obtaining it.

Mr. Thelwall had not seen his uncle Mr. Boyle; but he had accidentally heard of his having landed at Cape Town in a most precarious state of health. The name had caught his attention, and he had taken some pains to inquire his address, and try to see him.

"I don't know what made me do it," said he; "but I was so sure he was your uncle; and I thought perhaps I might be of use to him, knowing the country pretty well as I did. However, I could not see him. There was a sinister-looking, black-haired individual of a man-servant, who answered all my inquiries, but would not let me in. His master was very ill, he said—too ill to see any one at present; perfect rest was necessary; he had written home by the 'Northern Queen,' to say what he was going to do, and his doctors said he must not be disturbed. I did not like that man's looks, Boyle, at all; and it passed through my mind that he was wishing to keep others away perhaps, that he might have the better chance of a legacy himself."

“What sort of man was he?” inquired Astley, much interested.

“A small spare man with black hair and whiskers, and a remarkably sharp, rat-like face. That is all I remember of him, except that his teeth were peculiarly uneven, and of a more than commonly bad colour. What on earth can you want to know for! Do you think he has swindled you out of your property?”

“I will tell you by-and-bye. What next about yourself?”

“Why, I believe a week or two afterwards, I was ordered up the country, and did not return to Cape Town for two months. Well, then I called again; but they told me the gentleman had moved into quieter lodgings. I went there, curious to know the end, and found he had died, and been buried, and that the servant I had seen, had embarked for England with all his property. I hope you got it right, Boyle!”

“And are you sure my uncle was dead?” exclaimed Astley.

"Why are not you?" was the answer, in some surprise.

"Your account is the first we have had of it." replied Boyle.

"Possible! then the fellow was a rogue after all! I always thought so from his face," exclaimed young Thelwall, starting upright in the chair where he had been lounging. "Has he never made his appearance in England?"

Astley related what had actually occurred, and how there seemed reason to believe they had been cheated and imposed on, ending with inquiring if Mr. Thelwall thought he should know him again, could he see the servant.

"Can't say, precisely; and yet I think I should. I might venture to swear to him in a court of justice, if that is what you want. I should rather like to appear. I fancy I should make rather a good hand as a witness; and it must be great fun, when it is a fashionable trial, with plenty of fashionable women listening. Do let me be suppliced, Boyle?"

"I do not know that I shall have anything

to do with that. What we want now is somebody who has seen my uncle, and would know whether the man at Malvern is he!"

"I might know if it was the man I saw, perhaps. I could do no more."

"And probably not even that with his whiskers shaved close, and a grey wig," suggested Astley.

"Faith, no; I have no chance of helping you there. Suppose he should be the right man after all," added he presently, "pretty plight you would be in; why, he would never forgive your suspicion."

"No, I suppose not; but I do not know that it would signify very much. But now, about my real uncle; you had no proof he was dead."

"The people of the house where he lodged told me so—that was all. I asked no questions. I was not surprised; and I don't know that I ever remembered the fact again until I told my father, when he happened one day to mention your name. I was on my way home

on leave, having important family matters to arrange, and I suppose I must have arrived much about the same time as your precious self-styled uncle. I came home in a regular mail-packet, which I suppose he avoided for fear of company. But as I never told him my name, and he does not know I ever heard of him again, perhaps he might consider it all quite safe."

"He has no intention of remaining in England, to play the part of uncle to me," observed Astley. "Could he only have got the money in the Three per Cents immediately, he would have been off before now, I suspect. We were most completely blinded at first, and that, I presume, encouraged him to risk remaining. There are others concerned in catching him; but my particular part is to find out whether my uncle is really dead, as, in that case, by a will which he sent home about a year ago, I fancy I should inherit all his property."

"And yet you never saw him! 'Pon my honour, what a famous windfall, Boyle. Well,

I can give you names, and other information, to help you. Look here ; I can tell you a very honest fellow, at Cape Town, who will act as your agent, and get the certificates, and all those kind of things, of his death and burial, if that's any good."

"Thanks. I imagine it will be very useful by-and-bye ; but just at present we rather want some one who knew him alive. However, I will take a note of it."

"Do so ; and also of my wish to be called as witness, Boyle. Now come and have some luncheon, and make yourself pleasant to my cousins ; they are very nice girls, especially the eldest."

Astley accepted the luncheon, seeing that he must eat somewhere ; but I am afraid did not do his best in the other line, pointed out by Frederick Thelwall.

Anxious to get to Edinburgh, where he expected letters from London, with directions how to proceed, he did not indulge in any unnecessary delay ; but hurrying back to Aberdeen, he

arrived, without much loss of time, at Edinburgh, where, at the post-office, he found there was no news for him.

He was at liberty, therefore, to rest in peace that Friday evening, and as he could do nothing else until he heard from Mr. Allen, he contented himself with writing to that gentleman a particular account of his expedition to Aberdeen. It was a quiet amusement; and as the next morning's post brought him a letter to say his friend was at Glasgow, he was able to carry his own written account to its right destination, for which purpose he took a seat in a train on Saturday morning.

John Martin, the captain of the 'Northern Queen,' during that voyage home from Sidney in which Astley was interested, was at that time fitting out a trading vessel at Glasgow, and it was to see him that Mr. Allen had gone thither.

Astley and he met by appointment at the hotel, and then proceeded together to the lodgings, where Captain John Martin was supposed to be. Of course there was a good deal of delay, and

various disappointments before they met, as always happens when people are in a hurry ; and it was not until the evening of Saturday that they succeeded in securing an interview with the person they sought.

He was on the point of sailing for the south of England, and wind and weather permitting, hoped to have dropped down the river that night with the tide, and to be far upon his voyage before Monday morning. It was some time before they could exactly bring him to the point of giving precise answers to what they wished to know. He seemed afraid of committing himself by replies, until he understood what the object of the questions was. At length, however, but not till Astley had begun to despair, he became communicative on the subject of his former passengers. He remembered Mr. John Boyle very well ; a pleasant, open-mannered gentleman, with an agreeable face, a courteous address, and a remarkably venerable appearance, from the silvery hair, which he wore rather long and curly.

He had been a great favourite on board the vessel, and every body was grieved when he fell ill ; but it came on so gradually, and was so evidently a breaking up of his constitution, that no one could imagine he had any chance of recovery.

Mr. Allen inquired if he was alone.

“No,” said Captain Martin, “he had a servant with him, a steady respectable man, who seemed much attached to his master. He was supposed indeed, to be rather superior by education to the situation he then held. He was careful of letting out much about his previous history ; but it was generally believed he had been some unfortunate speculator glad to work his passage home, even in a menial capacity. Mr. Boyle had appeared to confide in him very greatly, and although not a pleasant-mannered man, it was evident that Robert Masters had the art of making himself agreeable to him. They had landed at the Cape together, Masters telling the Captain that he was resolved not to leave his employer whilst he lived, unless actually dismissed, and Mr. Boyle speaking in strong terms of his obligation to

his careful and zealous attendant, and his hope that he should be able to recompense such devotion.

“And now, gentlemen,” said he, “now that I have answered all your questions, may I ask to what they tend? What do you want of me?”

Mr. Allen put the question directly, could he go down with him to Malvern, on business of importance connected with this same Mr. Boyle.

Captain Martin’s reply was a decided negative. He was compelled to sail without delay, and although regretting that he was unable to oblige them, it was impossible to comply. A week or ten days hence, when his present vessel would probably be at Southampton, he could meet them when and where they pleased; and if that would do, he was at their service. At present, he was bound to consult his employers’ profit, and the ‘Madge Wildfire’ must leave Greenock with the tide.

Mr. Allen and Astley looked at each other in silence. The latter was disheartened considerably. The lawyer then began to enquire about

his other passengers, during the same voyage ; and fortunately for them he was able to give them a little help in this respect. One of the gentlemen, Mr. Walter Long, was an Irishman, and his family, he believed, resided at Belfast, or in that neighbourhood. As to the others, he did not know much. He had a notion Mr. Harris was a north-country gentleman ; but he was not sure. He did not seem very communicative, and it was not his business to ask. Mr. Van de Meulan and his wife, he concluded, would be long ere this in Amsterdam, unless they had returned to the East Indies.

To Belfast, therefore, Mr. Allen and Astley decided to go, after making Captain Martin promise, that as soon as the 'Madge Wildfire' arrived at Southampton, he would send word to Mr. Allen.

Monday morning, therefore, saw them on the deck of the 'Stork,' on their way to Belfast, where they trusted to arrive in something less than twenty-four hours ; and as the weather was fair and bright, there seemed every prospect

of their having a reasonably pleasant voyage. Astley was, however, much too uneasy and anxious for anything to be pleasant, except the speed with which the paddle-wheels revolved, and the rapidity with which the beautiful banks of the Clyde receded from his view. He was meditating moodily on what all this delay would lead to. A week had gone since he quitted Malvern, and they seemed scarcely nearer the point than before. He was not so much afraid of the culprit ultimately escaping, as he was of Miss Grant not receiving warning in time to prevent her accompanying him. It seemed so cruel to her, when they saw what a snare she was stepping into, not to endeavour in some way to prevent it. She had done nothing, he thought, which deserved so harsh a punishment; she had not joined in the forgery, or connived at the dishonesty. She had simply been deceived, like the rest of the world; and for this misfortune on her part, was she to suffer the additional mortification of marrying a man whose only good quality seemed to be, that he was a clever rogue !

Astley said so much on this point, that Mr. Allen became seriously alarmed, lest, in a fit of chivalrous generosity, he should endeavour to give her a hint which might put her on her guard. The lawyer, himself, looked on the engagement as a lucky thing altogether. It kept the impostor quiet at Malvern, it gave Astley a plea for absenting himself unsuspected; and as to the lady, he did not think it signified greatly; for if she did not like the marriage, she would be able to get it set aside since it would be contracted under a false name. It was true, this would give her trouble and cost her a good deal of money, but Mr. Allen thought she deserved some punishment for her cold, mercenary feelings, and could not be brought to pity a woman who married only for the sake of a large dowry.

His letters that morning had brought Mr. Allen word, that instructions had been transmitted to Mr. Boyle's bankers immediately to raise twelve thousand pounds, if possible, on some securities they had in their hands to about that amount; intimating that this money was

to be settled on the future Mrs. John Boyle. Mr. Allen thought this the most amusing part of the whole transaction; that a man who knew he had no claim to a farthing of the property, should pretend to make a settlement of this kind, was what he had not calculated on in the least.

"She sells herself cheap too," continued he, as he was detailing the matter to Astley, "I wonder she is content with anything under twenty. I suppose this Norman Grant, who is named as one of these trustees, is her brother."

"I trust we shall save them the trouble of signing these settlements," said Astley, smiling a little. "I am afraid it will be rather an unprofitable piece of business to this Worcestershire attorney, unless I pay for the drawing."

Just at this moment, Astley received a slap upon his back, so powerful, as positively to make him jump, and turning round he saw with much less satisfaction than surprise, his Malvern acquaintance, Mr. Malone, who, seizing his hand

shook it with boisterous delight, and then repeated the same process to Mr. Allen.

"And where are you going?" exclaimed he, "and how long have you been here, old fellow?"

Mr. Allen answered both questions in one word, "Belfast."

Mr. Malone protested that it was an unexpected pleasure; one he could not be thankful enough for, and then added, when did they hear last from Malvern?

"You have not heard since you left, have you?" said Mr. Allen to his companion, who replied in the negative.

"Ah! then I can give you the latest news of your beautiful cousin and aunt, and all our friends there, for I left them only on Friday evening."

"And how goes on the world there, Mr. Malone?" inquired the lawyer. "We are intensely curious."

"It goes on much as you might expect," exclaimed he, energetically, "when such an angel

as Miss Denys is there, to break men's hearts. She is more bewitchingly beautiful than ever ; and, for my own part, I own I am quite desperate. I stood it as long as I could ; but hearts are not flint—at least, not all hearts ; and so, lest mine should be broken past mending, I ran away, and left others to complete the sacrifice which I declined to make.”

“ That must be a terrible loss to her, I should think,” observed Mr. Allen ; “ although, as we all know discretion is the better part of valour, perhaps you hoped your strength of mind, in decamping, would make an impression, which your presence would not.”

“ I really do not desire to make any impression on her. I have discovered that matrimony is out of my power, for family reasons ; so I have no wish to entangle her affections, or those of any woman, when I do not intend to commit myself.”

Astley made a most impatient movement. Mr. Allen laughed softly, and inquired who was at Malvern now.

"Who will fill our vacant places?—why, I fancy that young lady's brother, Mr. What's-his-name, you know. He does his best that way."

"The only antecedent young lady mentioned, was Miss Denys. She has no brother, surely?" said Mr. Allen.

"Exactly ; she has no brother ; Miss Grant is the lady I meant. Ah, by the way, Mr. Astley Boyle, allow me to congratulate you on the charming prospect of having such a handsome aunt. She is all my fancy could paint ; she is splendid ; she's divine. I really do congratulate you."

"I am much obliged," said Astley, coldly withdrawing his hand from a terrible shake. He had a great mind to walk away, only he wanted to hear more about Malvern, and he did not wish to appear to mind what was said.

"So, Miss Grant has her brother with her," observed Mr. Allen, calmly.

"Yes ; a fine, dark, handsome man, much such a fellow as your humble servant ; clever and sprightly. He will sing our songs to-night,

or those of anybody else either. He, and Miss Denys, and Miss Grant, and the tall American girl, sang duets by the hour, all four at once, like Grisi herself, and Mr. Clarke and I did the listening, and cried *encore* till I came away."

"And yet you left them, when you were so necessary and useful to their society."

"Too necessary, sir : I felt I might become indispensable ; and preferred leaving whilst I was free. I do not wish to drag at each remove, a lengthened chain ; the figure is more pleasant than the fact. So I escaped, one evening, to the sound of Good ' night, all's well. ' "

"I admire your prudence ; but would not this Mr. Grant, of whom you spoke, have shielded you in some degree ? Could he not have stood between you and the tremendous battery of fine eyes, to which you were exposed ?" inquired Mr. Allen.

"Mr. Norman Grant rushed into the engagement with desperate energy. If courage, devotion, self-sacrifice, ardour, admiration, zeal, can win a woman, then is Miss Flora Denys the lawful

prize of Norman Grant. I read their fate in their mutual glances ; and I see for them, love and matrimony in quick and happy readiness. He is clever, she is rich ; he is eager, she is willing. Who can doubt the event ?”

“ Pshaw !” was the angry ejaculation, which Astley could not suppress, but which his companion endeavoured to cover with a laugh.

“ He probably came down for his sister’s wedding,” suggested the latter.

“ He came down for his own—that is my belief,” replied Mr. Malone, eagerly. “ He came down to win the heiress, and he will win her ; Wednesday, she looked at him ; Thursday, she danced with him ; Friday, she rode with him ; she sang with him, she laughed, she whispered, she flirted. I could stand it no longer ; I quitted—I am here.”

Astley put his hand through Mr. Allen’s arm, and dragged him away.

“ The fellow distracts me ; he passes my patience. Upon my honour, he ought to be tossed

into the sea," murmured he, as he left Mr. Malone behind.

"The sooner you lay in a large stock of the useful commodity called patience, the better, my dear friend," said the lawyer calmly. "Patience is like learning, better than house or land in certain respects; and I strongly recommend you to try and secure enough of it, at least, to bear with the silly assertions of an absurd coxcomb like this."

Astley groaned wearily. "He does talk such nonsense."

"Granted; but then being nonsense what does it signify. Let him say what he likes, but do not let him do what he wishes, if his wish is to annoy you; and if it is purely vanity, why should you care. He can do no harm by his folly unless you allow it. If you want to keep flies out of your mouth, just shut it. Do not you understand?"

"I will try; we must be here all day, so it is as well to bear it patiently."

"By-the-bye, Mr. Boyle, what, may I ask,

takes you over to the Green Island to-day?" said Mr. Malone, joining them again at the next turn they took.

"Friendship for me," replied Mr. Allen. "I had business at Belfast, and Boyle keeps me company."

"Ah, friendship is a fine thing," returned the other. "Now, could not I be of any use to you, in any way, gentlemen? I know Belfast well."

"We are really much obliged, Mr. Malone, and if we find it necessary, we will apply to you without scruple."

Astley did not recover his equanimity during the rest of the voyage. Mr. Malone was continually making offensive allusions, which hurt his feelings, with regard to Flora; or he was asking impertinent questions relative to Mr. Boyle, senior; or he was fishing to find out for what purpose they were going to Belfast. Mr. Allen saved his companion all possible trouble, by answering in the most apparently careless, and really careful way, all the different

interrogations and insinuations ; but still they were a nuisance and an irritation.

Even when evening came on, and he sought his berth with the hope of quiet sleep for the remainder of the night, he was tormented with the ideas and fancies which his unwelcome companion had called up. Flora singing, dancing, riding with another, smiling on his courtesies, laying herself open to the remarks and criticisms of such a man as Malone, was too provoking to be easily got over. There must be some ground for the observations so decidedly made—he could not have invented facts ! This handsome and accomplished man must really be there, profiting by his absence, supported by Louisa, encouraged by this self-styled uncle, and backed by all the weight which his own absence, and unexplained movements could give to a rival.

Flora exposed to this temptation—doubting him, perhaps hearing that denial which had been so needlessly forced from him—what would be the result ?”

Would she be trustful, and give him credit for good motives? Hope and affection said—yes! Would she be influenced by those around her, caught by novelty, guided by intrigue, yielding to doubt, and so suppressing an affection which he once hoped was all his own? Self-distrust, diffidence, and anxiety whispered their unwelcome affirmative, and hope seemed crushed and overpowered.

So passed the night; and when, after much restless cogitation, and still more profound slumber, he woke on Tuesday morning, the steamer was quiet, and they were in harbour. To repair to the best hotel to breakfast, and to make enquiries for the residence of Mr. Long, was their next step, but one which did not at first promise much success.

Astley's spirits had, however, in some degree returned. The necessity of exertion, and the having his foot on *terra firma*, both restored his happier feelings; so he set out on the quest with ready zeal.

All Tuesday was passed in researches for the

gentleman of the name of Long, who was supposed to reside in this town; but their efforts were fruitless; and it was not till other means had entirely failed, that the lawyer, as a last extremity, consented so far to admit Mr. Malone into their confidence, as to confess to him they were in search of a gentleman whose family, and residence were entirely unknown to them, and of whom they had only ascertained that he had returned from Sydney four months previous.

These mysterious circumstances were enough to excite the liveliest curiosity; fortunately, however, the confidence was not made in vain. Mr. Malone was able to inform them that Mr. Long, whose son was the individual in question, had some time, lately, inherited a considerable property in the north of England, and that he believed he would now be found located in the vicinity of Keswick.

With all the enthusiasm of the most generous friendship, Mr. Malone kindly offered to return at once to England, and conduct them to the house of Mr. Long. As, however, they soon discovered

that he had never been there himself, Mr. Allen judged that his escort would not be very useful, and hoped that they should have sagacity enough between them, to find Keswick without his help. He next pressed on them a proposal of a letter of introduction, which he would write for them, if they would only explain what they wanted of Mr. Long. But as it did not appear that their disinterested friend had the smallest acquaintance with the gentleman to whom he volunteered to introduce them, this also was declined, with all, or perhaps rather more, than the thanks it deserved.

It was settled that they should return immediately to Glasgow, where Mr. Allen expected to find letters awaiting him ; and as their voyage was prosperous and quick, Wednesday afternoon found them once more treading the streets of Glasgow.

Letters were awaiting them here, forwarded according to instructions left by Mr. Allen. There were two wondering and rambling epistles from Mr. Denys to Astley, one of which mentioned

that he had heard from Flora, but gave no further particulars. There was also enclosed the letter from Miss Grant, before mentioned ; and if the writer could have witnessed the agony of indignation and impatience which it occasioned her correspondent, she would probably have thought she had not written in vain.

“ Give me five hundred pounds as a wedding present !” exclaimed he. “ What ! when they are trying all they can to rob me of what I hold dearest on earth. It is false, impossible, absurd ; I do not, and I will not believe that Flora cares one iota for this man. Miss Grant may pretend what she pleases ; but Flora’s heart is mine, or shall be, or ought to be. She does not care for this brother—this dancing, singing brother of hers !”

To do Astley justice, his ill-humour did not last long, although his anxiety only increased as his irritation was subdued. He was too good to be peevish to his companion, who was really working so hard in his service, with a zeal which money alone could not repay ; and so, after a few exclamations, and walking once or

twice about the room, he was able to sit down and endeavour to listen quietly to what Mr. Allen had to say.

The news transmitted from London was the exact whereabouts of Mr. Walter Long, whose father's residence they had succeeded in tracing. This they would have been thankful to have received two days earlier ; but as lost time was past lamenting, all they had now to do, was to proceed to Keswick as quickly as they could, and obtain a meeting with that gentleman.

Time was flying fast ; there wanted now but eight days to that which, as Louisa had announced in her letter to him, was to " seal her fate." Little dreamed she what that fate was to be ; and even in his present state of indignation against her, she was yet to Astley's mind an object of pity. The disappointment, which must be hers, would be keen in proportion to her present triumph.

They found the residence of Mr. Walter Long without difficulty, although unaided by the genius of Mr. Malone. But they found, as was not

wonderful, that the young gentleman himself was not at home. He was absent on an expedition up the Rhine; and although the father, a pleasant, gentleman-like man, offered to write and summon his son home, when he witnessed their evident disappointment, that, of course, would not avail them at all at present.

Their anxiety was, however, relieved by an observation of Mr. Long's.

"There is a neighbour of ours, Edward Harris, who was a fellow-passenger of my son's, who, perhaps, could have given you any information you may require; but he is, I believe, in London at present."

London! What was his address? That would do very well. Mr. Long gave the address, and the gentlemen returned to Keswick, *en route* for London.

They reached it late on Saturday evening, and Mr. Allen declaring that nobody's business should again prevent his enjoying a quiet Sunday with his wife and daughters, went home to

Brompton, promising to see Astley early on Monday morning.

The letter from Mr. Clarke, which Monday's post produced, although satisfactory so far as containing the much-desired intelligence regarding Edward Harris, and a promise to see him immediately, and settle everything necessary, was not otherwise quite so agreeable. Astley had written from Keswick numerous questions about Norman Grant, and Mr. Clarke, not feeling at liberty to repeat what that young man had told him in confidence, was forced to content himself with somewhat vague and indefinite answers. He flattered himself, indeed, that he had done extremely well, and had avoided creating jealousy, as well as betraying secrets. But he did not calculate on the peculiarly sensitive temperament of a lover's mind, or the aptitude they always have to torment themselves with uncalled-for solicitude.

The result of his information was an eager desire to go down at once, and secure a promise from Flora of her love and faith. If she doubted

him, it was his due ; if she trusted him, it was hers, to clear his character and express his truth. He argued the matter with his step-father, soon won his consent, and, indeed, convinced him the measure was perfectly right. He had more trouble in convincing Mr. Allen of the propriety of the plan ; perhaps, because he was shy of putting forward his true reason.

The lawyer thought it dangerous, unnecessary, and unwise.

Astley promised to be discreet, to conceal himself, and to be prompt in his movements. He had his own way, of course ; as Mr. Allen could not prevent it, he saw it was most prudent to acquiesce ; and Astley, secured by the romantic disguise in which he had presented himself to Flora, reached Malvern on Monday evening, and located himself at the New Inn for the night.

So far as Mr. Harris was concerned, he found his journey was useless. The agent of the police, who, ever since the first suspicion, had been lodging in the village, to watch the impos-

tor's movements, informed him that the two gentlemen had started for London, on Monday afternoon, after Mr. Harris had fully certified himself, that the man who called himself Mr. Boyle was an impostor.

Finding that Mr. Hamilton was in the secret, he next applied to him to procure him an interview with Flora ; the result of which has already been related. But, owing to the delay consequent on this meeting, Astley missed the train, and did not arrive in London till long after he was both expected and wanted by his confederates there.

CHAPTER VIII.

Could I sing what I feel, and express by a note
How justly esteeming, how fondly I dote,
Then would music no more be a nice thing of art,
But as in old time, the true voice of the heart.
I could sing all day long—sing song after song
Like an angel, singing clearly,
But I cannot sing now—I protest and vow,
Because I love you dearly.

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

“Look here,” said Mrs. Newton to Flora, that evening, as they sat together in the drawing-room, “look how I occupied myself this hot afternoon; as I could not take bodily exercise, I gave my mind some employment, and here is the result. It is your own thought and feeling, otherwise I should not expose it to you.”

Flora unfolded the paper Mrs. Newton gave her, and read as follows :

THE MUSIC OF THE FUTURE.

“ I am listening to the Future !
How its echo swells,
Ringing in uncertain cadence
Like sweet distant bells ;
Or the deep, mysterious murmur
In old Ocean’s shells.

Mother, ’tis like far-off music
Rising on the ear :
Now I almost catch the measure,
For it draws so near.
Youth and hope both lead the chorus,
Do not bid me fear !”

“ Child ! Time’s music, which approaching,
Seems to you so gay,
Sounds to me like funeral wailing
For life’s brightest day.
’Tis the dirge of happy childhood,
Gone from you away.”

“ Mother ! still I’m looking onward.
For a change is stealing
On the sweet advancing music ;
Deep, and full of feeling
Seems the ever swelling chorus,
Love and hope revealing !

And my heart is all on tiptoe,
Straining for the sound ;
And my fancy wild with transport,
Fain would onward bound
To enjoy it. All the present
In its tone is drowned !”

“ Daughter, love and hope together
Seldom speak the truth.
Hush your transport ; heed my warning
Those gay tones, in sooth,
Oft are found to ring the dirges
Of light-hearted youth !”

“ I have listened for the Future,
Watched with ear and eye ;
Ever thinking gleeful music
Must be drawing nigh.
Ever letting present pleasure
Slip unheeded by.

“ Mother, clouds have gathered o'er me,
Darkening all the air,
Far behind I see the landscape
Bathed in sunshine fair.
But the music now advancing
Breathes of grief and care.”

“ Daughter ! know that earthly pleasure
Still on sorrow verges,
False her hopes—as false each promise

Which young fancy urges !
Said I not Time's music passing
Turns to funeral dirges.

" There's a harmony deceives not,
With its tones so holy,
Stand not idle—march to meet it ;
Bravely march though slowly.
In pure hearts its ceaseless echo
Softly sounds, and lowly.

" In your days, or dark or cheerful,
Make its songs your treasure ;
Patient set your pilgrim footsteps
To its solemn measure.
This, when time has sunk in silence
Ends in holy Pleasure."

" Thank you," said Flora, when she had read them. " I did not know you could have made so much of my foolish thought. I shall try and remember the feeling and principle, and act on it, if I can."

Mrs. Newton glanced at her. There was something which told of hope, and re-animated cheerfulness in Flora's tone and voice. There was mental happiness in her eyes, which the downcast lids could not conceal ; there was new

life in her gestures. Her friend saw that something had happened, with which she was as yet unacquainted ; and, although too discreet to make inquiries, or press for confidence, she was satisfied that Flora was no longer in much danger of yielding to despair.

Mr. Hamilton, who was sitting near them, looked a little curiously at the paper Flora was reading.

“ Is Mrs. Newton writing you moral essays ? ” said he, smiling. “ Do let me see it, if it is not a secret.”

Mrs. Newton hesitated ; but Flora said softly but eagerly, “ Oh yes, do ; he will understand.”

“ It is not to be handed round for the public benefit, at least,” replied Mrs. Newton ; “ pray be discreet.”

He nodded, and took the paper, perused it with much attention, and, perhaps in a fit of absence, afterwards put it into his pocket.

“ I am glad you have undertaken to teach her patience and contentment,” said he, gravely. “ Such a teacher, and such a scholar, ought to

make considerable progress. I have half a mind to join your class myself."

"You have already appropriated this lesson, I perceive," said Mrs. Newton. "The next I should give you, would be on the meaning of the possessive case, as applied to the personal pronouns."

"I am quite *au fait* at that, as you would find," replied he quietly, "mine, thine, and hers, are the singular number; but if the noun to which they refer were to leave its present position, we should, probably, have to substitute for them, the possessive pronoun, *theirs*; and that you said you should decidedly decline."

Mrs. Newton smiled, glanced at the many pairs of eyes which had been added to their circle since she sat down beside Flora, and acquiesced in his decision. Norman Grant, especially, was standing near, looking curious and desponding.

"Where were you, Miss Denys, during the thunder-storm?" was a question very innocently asked by one of the party, when everybody was discussing that affair.

She replied, glancing gravely at Mr. Hamilton, that the rain had overtaken her on the top of the hill, and driven her for shelter to a cottage on the western side. Everybody was extremely surprised at this announcement ; some at hearing that she had gone out at all, others at her venturing so far, and others at nothing particular, or all these together. Louisa Grant asked her if she had been walking alone, to which she replied calmly, that she had not ; Mr. Hamilton had been with her. The gentleman looked up at hearing his name, just in time to catch the very suspicious glance which Norman Grant threw on him, and said quietly :

“ Yes, I met Miss Denys going out, and obtained leave to escort her , and it was well I did, for I flatter myself I was of great use during the storm. Are none of you, ladies, going to give us any music ; Miss Denys, I hope you have not lost your voice from your mountain climb ?”

Flora was very complying. The night before she would not have had spirits for singing, now she felt up to anything.

"What a number of duets you have," observed Hamilton, turning over her music, "who sings these with you?"

"They are not all mine; some are Miss Carden's, some Mr. Grant's. Do go and ask Miss Carden to come and sing with me!"

"And Mr. Grant?" demanded he, but she shook her head.

Annie complied with the request, perhaps from fear of comments on her silence, although not herself in very good spirits: and by some arrangement of Louisa's too, Norman was induced to join, and Flora could not, without positive rudeness, refuse to allow him to accompany her, although they neither of them acted from their own wishes. In consequence, however, of his sister's adroitness, the desponding lover had the opportunity of addressing the idol of his soul in all the passionate language of Italian and German love songs; laying peculiar emphasis on every declaration of hopeless attachment, heart-broken reproach, or languishing affection with which such music abounds.

Unfortunately for him and the effect of his efforts, Flora's mind was away, out on the top of the hill, or in the cottage in the glen, or perhaps on the railroad to Birmingham; and all the pathos and emphasis of Norman failed to recall it to actual facts. She sang, indeed, with tenderness, taste, and feeling, quite equal to his, because her declarations of affection, and professions of constancy were mentally addressed to her absent and accepted lover; and unconsciously she gave each turn and expression which marked emotion or love, with a truth resulting from sincerity. But of her companion's feelings she was quite careless, not bestowing a thought on him, and even when he favoured them with a solo, and concluded his song with the passionate invocation,

“Waking, sleeping, smiling, weeping,
Still I think of thee.”

she was alike insensible to glance and tone, but sat by with down-cast eyes, and fitting smile and blush, as she thought to herself such would be Astley's sentiments and feelings.

Norman could not quite understand her, and he would have given something considerable to ascertain whether that very becoming flush on her cheek was the result of secret emotion, or of exposure to the rain that afternoon ; but this was a mystery he never discovered.

Probably, the day preceding a marriage is always one of excitement, bustle, anxiety, worry, and other such emotions ; and although Louisa Grant's was to take place under peculiar circumstances, she managed to produce quite disturbance enough by it. Everybody seemed unsettled, and in a state of expectation ; the ladies, who were intimate with the bride, were much occupied in assisting the many small arrangements necessary on such an occasion : tying up and directing wedding-cards, preparing favours, ornaments for the *déjeûnée*, and other important matters ; Louisa being so especially anxious on the subject of her wedding-cards, that she took care to see them all properly prepared herself, that there might be no mistake.

The bridegroom appeared also much excited, to a degree which made him very restless and fidgetty. He never sat still for five minutes, was perpetually wandering from room to room, or perambulating the garden. Since he had been at Malvern, he had rarely been known to go beyond that limited territory, and seldom walked at the same hours as the other inmates, but, now deprived of Miss Grant's society, who had been often his companion, he prowled about with an uneasy countenance, or paced backwards and forwards, with the quick, short, angry-looking step of a panther in a cage.

Hamilton seemed put out about something, and did not take his usual exercise. He sat on a seat on the lawn, with a book in his hand, for a couple of hours that day, a thing which he had never been known to do before. Not that he was supposed to be reading; for Flora, who during a great part of that time was chatting with the twin sisters by their window, declared that she did not believe he had turned over a page twice, whilst she sat there, and was

inclined to suspect that the book was wrong side upwards.

She herself was not suffering from any want of energy, or spirits ; but, although from a different cause, was, perhaps, as restless as either bride or bridegroom. But she was in good temper with every one, looking at all events now through a coloured medium, which threw a warm and glowing tint on the prospects around.

Whilst they were here, Mrs. Newton came down, accompanied by a lady whom Flora recognised at once. It was Miss Fielder, elegant, lady-like, and quiet as ever, but with a glad expression, a look of relief and repose, which was what her countenance had wanted to make it quite agreeable. It spoke now of happiness as well as submission. Mrs. Newton introduced her companion to her "young friends, and they soon became quite sociable.

"What gay doings you are going to have here to-morrow," observed Miss Fielder after a little chat. "Do you form one of the bridal party?" looking at Flora.

"Yes," said Miss Denys, in a tone which seemed to imply some reluctance on her part. "I could not help it—I hate being bridesmaid ; but when one is asked to a wedding, it seems churlish to refuse, so I said yes."

"Is that intended as a reflection on me, Miss Denys?" inquired Hamilton, who had laid down his book, and joined the group, on Mrs. Newton's appearance ; "you know I have refused to assist."

"I hear you have, Mr. Hamilton ; but I expect you will relent in your own favour, if you look at the breakfast. No man could resist the champagne," replied Flora.

"No ; I shall stick to my grey shooting-coat, and devote myself to study and philosophy," replied he. "There are quite enough without me. But is the hour really altered? I understood at first it was to take place at eleven ; but now I hear that the bridegroom is in a hurry, and ten is to be the time."

"Yes ; and they will be rather hurried even then," said Mrs. Newton. "The bride will

hardly enjoy her breakfast. They have altered the arrangement with some reference to the trains."

"Those trains are the plague of one's life," exclaimed Hamilton, more impatiently than he often spoke. "They are always too early, or too late, to suit one. Have you a Bradshaw, Mrs. Newton?"

"Not in my pocket," said she, smiling; "but I will get you one when I next go upstairs. I would fetch it at once, only that would shock you."

"Of course it would."

Annie Carden, however, produced one from their room; declaring, at the same time, that she could not understand how any human intellect could ever discover anything they wanted to know from that work.

Mr. Hamilton sat down by her, and begged to be allowed to teach her the use of this book. He was not a genius himself, he said, but he thought he could understand these tables, perhaps, all the better for not being troubled

with wit. He worked his way through them, as through a problem in mathematics.

Miss Carden could not believe it possible, however, that any amount of diligence, perseverance, or attention, could ever make her mistress of these tables, and therefore begged to excuse his tuition altogether.

"Ah, you are too clever, I have no doubt," said he. "You are accustomed to jump right to conclusions, without the weariness of reasoning; but as the arrangements of railway trains usually defy all conjecture, however plausible, you must either submit to be guided, or remain in ignorance. I daresay *you* understand Bradshaw, Mrs. Newton?"

"Yes, I am stupid enough to be accurate," replied she, laughing at the compliment.

He applied himself to studying the pages with deep attention, and the ladies resumed their conversation.

"You are one of the bridesmaids, Miss Carden, are you not?" said Mrs. Newton.

Annie admitted it. She had never seen an

English wedding, and as she understood there was no duty attached to the situation she had accepted, she was not unwilling to perform her part. "The only point of importance," added she, laughing, "seems to be to have one's flounces and bonnet all quite correct. Miss Grant was very particular about that."

"The bore of being obliged to have a new gown, which I can never wear again," said Flora, "disturbs me very much. Apple green has not the slightest mercy for my complexion, and seems, indeed, to have been chosen in order to extinguish, as much as distinguish us all."

"Apple green is very trying," observed Miss Fielder, glancing at both young ladies. "Are the other bridesmaids pretty?"

"They are all pale and fair; Louisa Grant, herself, with her rich black and carnation, would do very well in the dress she has chosen for us," said Flora; "but Miss Carden's alabaster will look deadly; and my pink and white will turn yellow; and both Miss French and Miss Brathwaite, will appear ghastly under such an infliction."

"The philosophy of colours is not enough studied by ladies," said Hamilton, looking up. "How few seem to know how they attract the eye. And yet the arrangements of nature are constantly before one ; and nothing can afford finer lessons of effects and harmonies of colouring."

"When I was a little girl," said Flora, laughingly, "I used to beg for bonnets, because they were pretty, and liked to have them ornamented, without the slightest regard to effect. Now, I confess, my object is to be admired myself, and considering my bonnet as very subordinate to my face, take care that the former should never be so conspicuous as to make more impression on beholders, than the latter. I am not sure, however, which vanity is best."

"Your more recent one, decidedly," said Mr. Hamilton. "Morally, I suppose there is nothing worse in being vain of your face, than of your ribbon ; and the effect on the eye of spectators, is infinitely preferable. I do not remember your ever wearing a bonnet, except the one which got wet yesterday."

"How did you like the storm yesterday, Miss Carden?" said Miss Fielder. "You who are so tropical in your tastes, ought to enjoy such a contention of the elements as we had."

"How do you know my tastes are tropical?" replied Annie, instead of answering directly.

"Mr. Edward Clarke mentioned it," replied Miss Fielder. "We were talking of you the day he spent the afternoon with us. I had learned to know you well by sight, long ago, and was rather curious, I confess, to hear more about you."

Annie coloured, and looked gratified. She seemed tolerably sure that no harm had been said of her on the occasion.

On the whole, Miss Fielder's visit made a pleasant impression; and she was universally admired by the party she quitted, who agreed in praising her grace and sweetness.

She had not been gone long, and though Mrs. Newton had left them, and Hamilton had subsided once more into his chair, at a short distance, the three girls were still together, when

Mr. Clarke turned the corner of the house, and appeared before them.

His pleasant greeting, and the cheerful countenance he brought, were quite reviving to the party. He seemed very glad to be with them again; and neither of the young ladies showed any strong symptoms of sorrow. He was not allowed a very long interval, however, to express his pleasure; for he was almost instantly seized on by Hamilton, who, without any regard to the feelings of a lover just returned to the presence of his idol, carried him off impatiently, and kept him pacing up and down the gravel just opposite, but quite out of hearing.

"I wonder what secrets those two gentlemen have to talk about," said Flora, eyeing them with some curiosity, and naturally fancying it must be in some way connected with Astley; for like other girls in love, the universe was to her full of him, and nothing else.

"What an odd, uncereemonious way Mr. Hamilton has of proceeding," said Annie, who would rather he had let Mr. Clarke alone.

"Do you think he came back in such a hurry to attend the wedding?" suggested Flora archly.

"He does not intend to be present, I know," replied Mary; "he always said so from the first. I suppose gentlemen do not like those sort of things."

"I do not wonder at it," replied Annie, watching them attentively; "but he is so fond of Mr. Hamilton, that, perhaps, he declines out of friendship and sympathy. I like to see two men attached to one another."

"I wonder how we shall get through this evening," sighed Flora. "How glad I shall be when to-morrow is come."

"Why, I thought you considered it all a bore, Miss Denys," said Annie, rather surprised.

"Perhaps that is the reason she wishes for it," suggested Mary. "You think it will be a good thing to have it over? Do you know we have almost settled to go away next Tuesday Miss Denys."

"Where to?" inquired Flora.

"Only to some strangers again," said Annie mournfully. "We must go to some cousins first, and we know none of them even by sight. It will be dreadful."

"It is not a thing I should mind," replied Flora. "I like making new acquaintances, it is so amusing."

"It will not be so bad as Annie thinks," observed Mary, "and it is all on our way to Torquay. We heard from Mrs. Woodbridge to-day, and she has settled to be back early in August, when we shall join her; that will be pleasant."

Flora thought that any one, with such a prospect, had no great reason to complain; and when shortly after Mr. Clarke, escaping from his friend, again joined the ladies, and began eagerly inquiring how far their plans were settled, and entering into the details with the interest of one well acquainted with the subject, she concluded that it would be Annie's own doing entirely, if she did not carry with her, amongst

her unknown cousins, a source of interest which would impart its own bright glow to every other object.

Determined that everything connected with her marriage should go off with *éclat*, Louisa Grant exerted all her talent to make the last evening amusing and agreeable, and the generally prevailing feeling of restlessness, greatly aided her efforts on the occasion.

Everybody was glad to be set about doing something—to be obliged to move and make a noise—instead of thinking, and sitting still. She accordingly set them all to dance; first, waltzes and polkas for the young, and then a universal country-dance, which everybody was expected to join, old and young, indiscriminately. It was a very good idea; and as Flora had Hamilton for her partner, she had no reason to complain, and did not find the set too long.

It was during this dance, or, rather, just before they joined the set, that he whispered to her—"the owner of the Mackintosh was too late for the train after all."

Flora's eyes inquired how he knew, and he, in return, just whispered—"Clarke. However, it will be all right to-morrow, I trust."

Some singing succeeded to the country-dance, and then a set of quadrilles, when Flora was rather surprised by Norman requesting her for a partner. Little was said for some time between them; but to prevent appearance of awkwardness, Flora was at some pains to suggest a few common-place topics, which just prevented their going through the dance in perfect silence. Immediately on its conclusion, Louisa, who had been their *vis-à-vis*, came up, and intreated once more to hear one of her favourite duets, "for the last time." The pathetic eloquence of such an address, was not, of course, to be resisted, and they sang together, as they had often done before. When the song came to an end, Louisa turned round and said—

"Norman, you must take charge of all my music, until I come home again. Look, it is all scattered about amongst Flora's. I bequeath it to you."

"Then you must help me separate it," said he, "or how shall I know."

"We will look it out presently," was her answer, and then she moved away to speak to some of the party who were departing, leaving Flora beside her brother, trying to sort the loose music, which was, in fact, tumbled about in wonderful confusion. Miss Denys could not make up her mind to seem afraid to stay with him, and therefore, went on composedly with her occupation ; but, somehow, the party were all at the other end of that long room—no one was within hearing, and he could not resist the opportunity to speak again.

"Miss Denys, I shall leave this place to-morrow, immediately after my sister's marriage."

"We must get the music all right to-night then," said she.

"Never mind the music ; I wish it could stay amongst yours, to remind you sometimes of one who will not easily forget you."

She made him no answer, but looked inclined to move away.

"No, don't go; let me speak this once. Tell me, are all my hopes and wishes vain?"

"Perfectly so, Mr. Grant; I am not altered in that respect."

"Nor am I. Miss Denys, it is hard for me to believe all hope indeed excluded."

"Nevertheless, the sooner you do so, the better for you, and also the pleasanter for me. I am sorry to have caused you pain, Mr. Grant; I have owed you many pleasant hours, and I should have been very glad could we have parted now, looking forward to future friendly meetings; but since that cannot be, the sooner we part entirely the better; and then I trust you will speedily learn to think of me with the calm friendly feelings I entertain towards you."

"I shall never forget you, nor whilst you remain single shall I cease to think of you as I do," was his perverse and uncompromising reply.

"Let us hope better things. I am sure you are a man of too much sense deliberately, to resolve to waste your life in repining for

unattainable possessions ; you will think better of it."

The approach of others interrupted his protestations, and the party soon after separated for the night, with some whispered allusions to the morrow.

The morrow ! how differently was that viewed by the members of that one household. How many, and what various passions that one roof covered, and the darkness quieted till the morrow. What storms of fear and envy, what angry jealousies, and hopeless despondency, what sad forebodings, and sorrowful doubts ; what glad young hopes, and true-hearted love ; what gratitude for another peaceful day ; what weariness of sinful sorrow ; what patient resignation and sincere benevolence, that night were gathered in that household, and outwardly hushed to quiet and rest, whilst waiting for the morrow.

The loving girl, her little doubts and half-pleasant, half-painful fears at rest, slept in the happy oblivion which youth and hope bestow, and even in sleep thought with gladness on the

morrow. The affectionate sister soothed her own restless hours, by pleasant fancies and bright anticipations of happiness for her she loved, which, perhaps, that morrow might bestow. The satisfaction which kind words and deeds bestow, was the portion of some there, who, though themselves lonely or sad-hearted, yet thanked heaven that they did not live in vain, and trusted that to-morrow they might again be useful as to-day. And there was one, whose waking jealousies were not deep enough to break his slumbers, although he fancied them so real, and he slept regardless of the morrow. And another, whose throbbing heart, divided between self-gratulation and regret, now swelling with vanity at anticipated triumph, and then sinking with vexation at what that triumph cost her, would not allow her to enjoy repose ; but crowded her slumbers with wild fancies, and fearfully distorted visions of what to-morrow would bring forth. And one there was besides, more miserable than the saddest and most suffering there, whose dread and remorse would allow no rest

at all ; but whose quickened ear caught fearfully every distant sound, and deemed it a fore-runner of evil, and whose only wish seemed to be that suspense were ended, and that let the morrow bring what it would, it would be better to know than to fear the worst.

And over these the moon rose slowly and peacefully, and looked down in her bright summer glory upon white walls and glittering windows, where dwelt hate, and fear, and remorse, as calmly as on the clear dew-drop sparkling on the heather, or on the pure crystal waters playing in the well.

Even so mortal eyes scan only the outward appearance, and know nothing of the depths of passion, or of feeling lurking in the secret life.

CHAPTER IX.

If yet to-morrow, unbelied, may say,
" I come to open out, for fresh display,
The elastic vanities of yesterday."

THE important day arrived, and was ushered in, as the newspapers say, by as bright and perfect a summer's morning as any one could wish to see. The sky was a deep, delicious blue, flecked here and there by small snowy clouds, which, even in their slow and quiet motion, spoke of rest and peace. Trees and hedges, washed by the recent rain, wore a fresher green ; the gardens were brilliant with the rich flowers of middle summer ; the swelling fruits in the numerous orchards were already predicting a plentiful harvest ; the hop-grounds waved their

luxuriant vines in long wreathed garlands ; and the slight breeze sweeping over the ripening corn, gave a life and motion to the picture, which reminded one of the effect of the rolling ocean.

All Malvern was agape to see the wedding-festivities ; maid-servants and children peeped anxiously out of window ; donkey-boys and beggars hung about the church-yard ; and the importance of the confectioner's apprentice, whose master supplied the breakfast, was not to be told.

We dare not say how many ladies found it convenient to be out in the village about ten o'clock, without being in the least curious on the subject of the wedding, and as the Church is always very well worth inspection, we need not conclude that all the unusual visitors there, were drawn within its walls by a love of staring at a spectacle.

As to the bustle in the house, that is not to be conceived or described ; housemaids and waiters, with enormous white favours, were

perpetually rushing about in active agitation. Rustling of new silks, glimpses of veils, flowers and feathers, blessed the eyes and ears of lady's-maids. Miss Denys' little Janet had made herself a new cap for the occasion, which Mr. Clarke's man vowed was bewitching, and to describe the elegance of the four apple-green robed bride's-maids would require a more poetic pen than mine pretends to be.

Certainly, nothing could sit better, or be more fashionable, than these silks, flounces, jackets, and all, but the effect was exactly what Flora had anticipated, and, possibly, what the bride had wished, the young ladies themselves looked so ill, that no comparison could be drawn between their youthful charms, and the more mature beauty of Miss Grant.

Her toilette took a long time preparing, but at length, handsome, graceful, self-possessed, glowing with gratified vanity and ambition, beneath her Honiton lace and orange wreath, surrounded by everything which could enhance her triumph, or add to her charms, Louisa

Grant appeared amongst her attendant maidens, ready to step into the carriage which was to convey her to the Abbey Church.

Hamilton and Clarke were at this time walking in the garden, in a state of considerable anxiety.

"I am horribly afraid it will all go wrong, and he will escape," said the former.

"No, he cannot do that, even if by ill-luck the party should be too late here; he will be stopped at Liverpool; that is all safe."

"But for Astley's insisting on waiting to see Miss Denys, this would not have happened; it might have been over last night," pursued Hamilton.

"It was a blunder, but one cannot blame the poor boy," replied Clarke, with a natural feeling of sympathy for a lover's cause.

"It is hard upon the bride," continued the elder gentleman, "she would have been spared so much future trouble and expense could it but have been settled yesterday."

"Yes, but that was not possible, Edward

Harris's affidavit was the only proof we had at hand, every body else had failed. We may have plenty of witnesses by-and-bye, but to-morrow would have been too late. The trouble Allen and Astley have had is beyond belief."

"There are carriage-wheels," exclaimed Hamilton, "let us go round and see who it is."

"Come to my room, and keep yourself quiet ; my window commands the approach," said the other. They did so, and saw that it was the bridal party just setting out.

"There she goes, poor thing ; how little she knows !" said Hamilton.

"There she goes," thought Clarke, "how graceful she looks : when will she assume a veil and wreath, and fill the first place !"

"Hamilton, is it not always considered rather prophetic of being soon a bride, when a lady fills the part of bride's-maid ?" said he, aloud.

"I am sure, I do not know, Clarke ; how can you be such a donkey as to think of such absurdities ; oh ! I beg your pardon, you are

thinking of Miss Carden, of course," added he, relaxing a little from his first impatient tone.

"Really, my dear friend," replied Clarke, "I never knew you so touchy; are you going to have an attack of gout, do you think? surely, you cannot care all that for Miss Grant's disappointment?"

"It might so easily have been spared," said Hamilton; "I never can bear to see any woman make a fool of herself; and feel desperately inclined to rush out, and warn her now."

"She will shake off the fetters, when she finds they are not of gold," replied Clarke, "and she does so want to be a bride, that I think it would be rather a pity to stop her, now it is so nearly done. She may never have another opportunity. So long as they do not actually leave the house, I consider it will be all right. It would be uncomfortable for her to be left alone at Liverpool."

"It will be a great shock to young Norman, and I am inclined to think well of him."

"I like him well enough," replied Clarke,

“but I do not suppose he will take it much to heart.”

“Clarke, I believe you never had a sister,” said Hamilton, with feeling, “or you would better appreciate the disturbance a brother must feel in such a case.”

“Ah, that’s the cause of your tenderness ; I thought as much ; but, my dear fellow, if you knew all the mischief that this woman has tried to do by her manœuvring and arts, and her ill-will to Astley, you would not be so sorry that she should be caught in her own snare, and would admit that she will get no more than she deserves in the subsequent mortification and trouble. I trust their several punishments will be adequate to their different degrees of guilt.”

“That may be very true, Clarke, still she is a woman, and as such I must pity her, and would willingly save her from mortification and shame. Were she the worst of her sex, I would wish to prevent her enduring any evil I could avert ; and as to her meeting what she

deserves, would you and I, or any of us, like that doctrine applied to us?"

"That's true enough, I admit," replied Clarke, gravely.

"I hope you were satisfied with your reception from Miss Carden," said Hamilton after a pause.

"Are you in earnest," said Clarke, looking up with a comical expression.

"Yes, indeed, I want you to marry; I think it will do you a great deal of good. You will feel more consideration for women, when you have learnt their value by experience."

"Your continuing single, Hamilton, has saved one woman, at least, from being spoilt," replied Clarke, laughing: "if I could believe all women as single-minded and true as Annie, I daresay I should enter more into your notions and sentiments. Yes; she gave me a pleasant reception; coloured and smiled, and looked very bewitching when she saw me again, and did not seem sorry at all; and last night, she let me dance with her, twice, without the least apparent

reluctance, and you cannot imagine, Hamilton, how exquisitely delightful it is to dance with her. I don't wonder Norman Grant talked of zephyrs when he did so ; she is Grace personified."

"She is a good figure," observed Hamilton with a calmness which his friend thought very inadequate and unsuitable to the occasion.

"I should think she was ; her motions are perfection, her voice music ; I never saw a woman like her ; and now she is beginning to smile on me, shyly, and as if she were ashamed of herself, and afraid of being thought too bold, and to listen to me with a face of interest, although she does know my object and my wish, she is perfectly irresistible. Did you ever see anything more exquisitely graceful, than her attitude when she was singing last night."

"I am quite ready to take it on your word, but I did not look at her ; I daresay I was talking to Mrs. Newton at the time ; I do not remember that she did sing," said Hamilton.

"Is it not getting late? I wonder Astley is not come yet. I hope nothing is the matter!"

"There he is!" cried Clarke, after an interval of silence, starting up, "Hurra! it will be all right now," and he dashed out of the room, ran down stairs, and rushed out to meet Astley in the road. Hamilton watched him from the window; he saw the two meet, at the entrance gate, pause for a short time, and then Astley spoke to a man who was with him, who turned, and went back, whilst the others came on into the house. In another minute, they were both in the room with him, and Hamilton's hand was shaken vehemently, with an exclamation of joy.

"What makes you so late?" said the latter; "I began to despair."

"It is not eleven o'clock," returned Astley. "I thought we should have been in time to save their going to church; but Clarke says they hurried the wedding an hour."

"Yes; but what made you late? Why did you not come yesterday?" persisted Hamilton.

“We could not arrange things sooner. There was so much to do, after I got back. We could not leave London till late, and reached Birmingham in the middle of the night. We came on by the earliest train this morning to Worcester. We ought to have been here an hour earlier, but there was some delay on the line—something the matter with the engine—which detained us. How long have they been in church? What time is it?”

“So long that we expect them back every minute. I suppose you will lie *perdu* here to the last moment, Astley. I wonder whether you are hungry,” said Clarke.

“Not in the least, I am thirsty enough,” pouring out a glass of water as he spoke, “but I could not eat. I feel like a conspirator, shut up here. How glad I shall be when this is done. Thank Heaven, I have not to prosecute!”

“The Bank takes that off your hands, I imagine,” said Hamilton. “I am glad of that. Where is the officer with the warrant? What became of him?”

“He went back to give some orders about the carriage, when he found they were in church; I do not want the arrest to be in public, for the sake of everybody. He will be down here again directly, to wait their return, and do the thing quietly.”

“Aye, it will be better that the bride’s faintings or hysterics should be got over in-doors, where she can have sofa, and cold water, and doctor, and all restoratives handy,” said Clarke.

In the meantime, the wedding ceremony had proceeded, without other interruption than some little delay occasioned by the unpunctuality of the clergyman. It was a stranger who was to officiate, in the accidental absence of the vicar, and owing to some mistake in the delivery of messages, he was not ready so soon as was expected. Unfortunately, the fashion of securing the services of two or three reverend gentlemen on these interesting occasions, had not then been invented; had it been so, this delay might have been spared, and some good might have resulted from a custom which, in most

cases, serves principally to swell newspaper paragraphs, and bridal pomp. The party were delayed in the vestry full a quarter of an hour, during which time the impatience of the bridegroom, and the misgivings of the bride, were the only interesting incidents which helped the rest of the party to wile away the time.

When once the clergyman was in his place, all went on well and smoothly. The days are passed away since sensibility was considered becoming on such occasions. Nobody now thinks of crying at a wedding, and brides who, in compliance with the fashion, would have trembled, wept, or fainted fifty years ago, now go through their part with the heroism of Spartans, and are ready to summon all the world to witness their fortitude.

Spectators must admit that the new *régime* is an improvement on the old, and be thankful for this advance in polite refinement, and attention to appearances.

The ring was on, the blessing pronounced, the bride had signed her name, as she supposed,

for the last time as Louisa Grant; and congratulations and compliments being over, leaning on her husband's arm, she quitted the church porch, and entering the carriage, was driven back rapidly, amidst pealing bells, and screaming children, and the general noisy demonstrations vouchsafed by an English mob on any great or glorious occasion. The said mob having the advantage of being able to make a short cut, were ready to welcome the carriages on their return to the house; and the neighbouring walls and railings were splendidly adorned with boys in smock frocks, with handkerchiefs tied to sticks, and girls with bits of babies in their arms, and such other respectable and interested spectators. The German band, stationed on the grass, poured forth the Bridal Polka, as the new-married pair alighted, whilst obsequious waiters rushed out to escort them into the house. In the drawing-room was assembled the host of friends who had not been invited to go to church, but were only expected to make part of the happy circle round the breakfast-

table; and amongst these the bride advanced, smiling and gracious, kissing, shaking hands, receiving compliments, returning thanks, thoroughly engrossed with herself, and satisfied with her own position. The rest of the bridal party joined them; the four green brides-maids, the handsome brother, the aunt, in her rich peach-coloured brocade, and the clergyman whose voice had pronounced the nuptial blessing. Half an hour passed in general and unsettled chatter and bustle.

“Dear Mrs. Boyle,” said a lady, at last, advancing, “pray introduce me to Mr. Boyle; I have not the pleasure of knowing him.”

“Mr. Boyle!” exclaimed Louisa, suddenly remembering her husband’s existence, “where is he? He was here, just now—Norman, where is Mr. Boyle?”

Norman looked round, but in vain; nobody could see him—he was not in the room—he was not on the balcony—he was not in the hall. Perhaps, he had gone to hurry the packing; Norman ran up-stairs to see—but no, he

was not in his room, nor his servant either.

The question became general, was repeated all round, "Where is Mr. Boyle?" The echo reached the group of waiters outside, one of whom deposed that a person had asked to speak to Mr. Boyle, the moment after they came back from church, said his business was pressing, and could take no delay. Mr. Boyle had gone out to speak to him. No one had seen him since.

"Something about the carriage, I dare say," said Louisa; "he will be in directly;" and she tried to assume her usual demeanour; but the colour had paled on her cheek, and her spirits flagged.

A message was quietly delivered to Flora, to ask her to go up-stairs. She complied; and, at the top of the stairs, her hand was caught and imprisoned, whilst her exclamations were smothered ere she could utter "Astley" loud enough to be heard.

"May I come in?" said he, as she tried to

disengage herself. "Is your room empty?—I must speak to you."

"Yes—mamma is down stairs—come in?" She pushed open the door.

Janet was there. "I want Clarke and Hamilton," said he, hurriedly. "Janet, ask the two gentlemen to come here."

"What next?—what on earth is the matter, Astley?—are you frantic?—do tell me; you frighten me," cried Flora, anxious and half-terrified at his wild looks and manners.

"They must—I cannot; I can hardly speak, Flora; I only know you are mine—I have won you. But what to do, I cannot tell. Tell her—explain to her," added he, as his friends were ushered in by Janet, who, with feminine curiosity, busied herself with arranging the room. Nobody noticed her. Flora's heart beat so that she could not speak; and she looked from one to the other, in silence and suspense.

"My dear Miss Denys," said Hamilton, "do not frighten yourself. What a wretched bungler Astley is!—there was no occasion for this scene.

He has discovered that the individual who has hitherto passed as Mr. Boyle, is no other than a certain Robert Masters, and no more his uncle than he is yours. The real Mr. Boyle having died at the Cape, Astley is the undoubted heir to his property ; and Robert Masters is already on his way to London, under charge of a police officer, to answer for the crime of forgery."

Flora sat down, pale and trembling, quite overpowered by surprise.

The attentive Janet came hastily forward, and administered to her mistress's weakness, water, salts, and eau-de-Cologne ; which Astley snatched from her, and chose to apply himself, to her hands and forehead.

"Thank you," said she, after a moment, "I am not faint ; I was only sick at the thought of so much wickedness. Louisa Grant ! poor thing !" and jumping up, she exclaimed hastily to Hamilton, "How can this be broken to her?"

"That is just what we wanted advice about," replied he. "Astley, there, would send for you ; but I thought Mrs. Newton would have done better."

"Of course she would," replied Flora; "but now, to do the best we can. Janet, don't you stir from this room without my leave given, unless the house is on fire. Mind me!"

"Very well, Miss," said poor Janet, submissively, stopped on the very tip-toe of eagerness to go and spread the wonderful news.

"Then, Mr. Clarke, you know Norman Grant best. Go down and tell him. The sooner we put an end to the farce going on down stairs, the better."

"I had rather be shot," said Mr. Clarke, hastily. "Why is it to be put on me?—I have not the courage."

"Nay, then, stay up," replied Flora, quietly. "You come, Mr. Hamilton, and Astley, come with me."

She preceded them down stairs, with a decision, firmness and speed, which they could not resist.

At the door she paused a moment, then desiring the two gentlemen to go into a room close by, which happened just then to be empty, she

glided into the drawing-room. The buzz of conversation, and the general flutter and movement prevailing, prevented her being noticed. The bride was seated on a sofa, surrounded by gentlemen and ladies, but with her back to the door; and close to the entrance Norman was standing, looking absent and uneasy. A flush of surprise and pleasure passed over his face, as Flora addressed him in a low voice.

“Come with me; I want to speak to you.”

He followed her light footsteps, wondering and perplexed. In the room where she led him, he looked round. Hamilton and Clarke he knew; but who was the third—this stranger—what could this mean?

“This is my cousin, Astley Boyle,” said Flora, finding nobody spoke, and seeing they all looked awkward. “Nephew to the gentleman who—” She stopped, remembering that it was not Mr. Boyle, who had married Louisa.

“I understand,” said Norman, wondering that there should be so much mystery about so simple an announcement. “Nephew to my new bro-

ther-in-law. I am glad to see him. Will you not join our party?"

Norman held out his hand in a cordial manner, although certain unpleasant feelings of jealousy were working in his heart.

"No," said Astley, speaking quick, and putting away the proffered hand. "I am not the nephew—there is the most unfortunate mistake. The man who married Miss Grant is *not* my uncle."

"In the name of fate, what does this mean?" exclaimed Norman, surprised, alarmed, and completely puzzled. He looked from Astley, whose countenance was indicative of powerful emotion, to the calm concern of his two friends, and the pale but energetic expression of Flora Denys, who stood by, looking as a maiden monarch might, when she had to sign the death-warrant of a criminal.

"I am extremely sorry to be obliged to be the bearer of ill news. I had hoped to be in time to save Miss Grant from the unfortunate step she has taken," said Astley, more collectedly; "but I assure you it will not be irrevoc-

cable, and the marriage (I have a lawyer's opinion on the subject) will not be binding, on account of the feigned name of the wretched impostor, who has so successfully personated my deceased uncle."

Norman began to awake to the true state of the case.

"Impostor ! deceased uncle ! feigned name !" said he, slowly, changing colour as he spoke. He leant against the chimney-piece for support, and, covering his face with his hands, tried to think. "Go on," said he. "Tell me all : I feared something from the first."

In as few words as he could make the matter comprehensible, Astley detailed the facts as they had occurred ; and then reverting to the unfortunate bride, who was as yet ignorant of her impending fate, begged him to suggest what would be the best thing to do regarding her.

But Norman was quite at a loss ; he was afraid to make known the miserable facts, and he turned again to Flora in helpless despondency. She pondered a moment, and suggested that

perhaps Mrs. Hunter might assist them. Norman calculated on no good from her ; she had neither strength, nor prudence, nor energy, nor influence over Louisa, nor apparently one single useful quality.

They were unable to settle on anything, when the affair decided itself, as such matters often do. The bride wondering alike at the prolonged absence of her husband, and the disappearance of her brother, rose from her chair of state, and signing to her aunt and bridesmaids not to follow, she left the room so quietly as to be almost unobserved.

In the hall, the first thing her eye fell upon was her brother, standing in an open door-way, lingering and uncertain. She went up to him directly.

"My dear Norman," said she ; but Norman started back, and disclosed to her eyes, the figure of Astley Boyle and his companions.

"What is the meaning of this?" said she again, with a rising colour, and a flashing glance. "Mr. Boyle, or—as our new relationship entitles me now to address you—Astley, why do I find

you here, concealed, shrinking from sight ? Surely, it would have been better, handsomer, to have joined us openly ; you might then have seen as much of Flora as you pleased. Norman, what do you do here ? and, Astley, have you seen your uncle ?”

The idea darted into her mind that it was Astley who had sent to speak to him.

“ Louisa,” said her brother, in a faltering voice, “ I am afraid that I have bad news to tell you.”

“ My dear Norman, what is the matter ? Where is Mr. Boyle ?—what has happened to him ?”

“ Your husband, Louisa, is now—it is so bad—I am afraid to say it—can you bear it ?”

She sat down on a sofa, looking rigid and pale. What had happened ? Had he fallen down in an apoplectic fit ? Was she a widow, with settlements of only twelve thousand pounds, and was Astley to have all the rest ? All this passed through her mind in a moment, as she sat there ; and then in a low, deep voice, she said, “ Speak Norman.”

"Your husband is gone, gone away from you—us—all—" He stopped again.

She gazed at him with parted lips, and white cheeks.

"He is in the hands of justice—arrested—he is, in short—he is proved an impostor!"

Louisa started to her feet, and stared wildly at her brother.

"What? say that again?" cried she.

"The man whom you have married is not John Boyle; he is an impostor, who, under a false name has nearly succeeded in deceiving and ruining you, and all concerned."

"An impostor!" she exclaimed slowly; then turning, her eye fell upon Astley; and she sprang to him.

"This is some miserable plot of yours, Mr. Astley Boyle, some vile trick to cheat me of your coveted fortune. It is false, absurd, scandalous—a plot hatched by you and Flora Denys, and you too," glancing fiercely at the others. "What, Norman! could you be deceived by such a paltry trick as this? Can you see me

thus trampled on, and not turn and defend me? Astley Boyle, I defy and scorn you, and your schemes !”

She stood panting and swelling with rage and fear, and in her white robes, and floating veil, would have made no bad impersonation of a pythoness of old.

“Louisa,” said her brother, sadly and affectionately, “I knew you would feel it; but, indeed, I fear it is but too true. Let me take you to your room. This must not be—this violence will do no good. Be thankful that you are yet amidst friends. Come to your room.”

“What, do *you* believe it, Norman?” exclaimed she, her countenance changing to a piteous, imploring look. “Oh! say it is not true!”

“My dear sister, I cannot. I do believe it. The wretch who has so vilely deceived you, was carried off by an officer since returning from church on a charge of forgery. The gentleman whom he personated, died at the Cape. Both these facts seem indisputable !”

“Impossible! and he an impostor, a cheat, a

swindler—and am I really married to him. Am I the wife of a convict—a felon—a wretch—” she gasped for breath, then tearing off her veil and wreath, she trampled them on the ground with fury.

“Come away, Louisa, up-stairs with me,” again urged her brother.

“Those people—those people—the breakfast—all—all—what will become of them?—who will pay for this?—what must I do?”

“Only come up-stairs, and we will arrange all the rest—do now!”

“Shall I come with you,” said Flora, touched by her looks of wild and helpless despair. “Let me take you up-stairs. Come.”

Louisa allowed her to take her hand for a minute, then snatching it away, she dashed off up-stairs to her own room. Flora remained a moment to desire Norman to go to the drawing-room, to say the bride was suddenly taken ill, the bridegroom had been called away by important business in London, and all the company were requested to retire as quietly as possible. She then hastily followed Louisa’s steps.

CHAPTER X.

Say, what is worse than blank despair ?
'Tis that sick hope, too weak for flying,
That plays at fact, and loose with care,
And wastes a weary life in dying.

HARTLEY COLEBIDGE.

WITH her hand on the lock of her door, Louisa had paused in her hasty retreat; the full recollection of her situation, her disappointed hopes, her blasted ambition, her humiliating position, rushed into her mind, and she shrank from contemplating the useless preparations, and vain proofs of pompous expectations which had been doomed to be so signally overthrown. Could she face her new waiting-woman? could she even bear the sight of her now unnecessary packing-boxes, or the handsome dress in which

she was to have set out, a gay and prosperous bride? Where was her triumph now?

She was standing, with a look of blank despair and indecision, when Flora rejoined her. Her white cheeks, and expression of misery, filled Flora's heart with pity, and entirely effaced from her mind, all causes of grievance, either real or supposed, which Miss Grant's conduct might have given her. She thought of nothing but her apparent trouble, and how it might be best relieved.

Comprehending the reason of her hesitation, she took her hand, and said: "Come into my room, you will be quiet there, and I dare say your own is not very comfortable just now. Come and sit down here until all this bustle is over."

Louisa, glad to hide herself anywhere from those she was ashamed to face, allowed herself to be led forward, only saying, in a voice of utter wretchedness: "Do not let any one come near me!"

"No, no, you shall be as quiet as you like,"

replied Miss Denys, closing the door, "now sit down and rest."

The unhappy bride threw herself on the sofa and hid her face, whilst she endeavoured to contemplate the effects which must result to herself from recent circumstances, and to think what she should do next. But her mind was confused and stunned by the severity of the blow, and in proportion to her vain and selfish triumph in prosperity, was now her abject humiliation. She felt quite unequal to calm thought or quiet decision.

Flora was extremely sorry for her, and rather at a loss how to comfort her. No topic of consolation which suggested itself, appeared just then appropriate. She could not tell her to hope that the culprit might be acquitted; she could not expect her to rejoice that justice would be done to the injured and innocent; she could not quite say that after all, Louisa herself was in no way to blame, and bid her endure with resignation the sorrows for which she had not to accuse herself. So she stood by

her in pitying silence, until Louisa, raising her head, exclaimed with a look of helpless wretchedness :

“ Oh ! Flora, you do not know, you cannot guess how miserable I am ! What a discovery ! oh, what a shock this has been ! ”

“ Indeed, I am sure it must have been,” replied Flora, thinking of her own unhappiness when Astley had been blamed, “ I can understand how miserable you must be. To find that the person you have trusted and promised to love is so very bad—to have taken such a man for your—” but Louisa interrupted her by a scream, and starting on her feet, she cried :

“ Don’t name him, don’t call him that—he is not, he cannot, he shall not be called my husband ; I did not marry *him*—the swindler—impostor—wretch ! I am not *his* wife. The thing is monstrous and impossible. I am not his wife ! ” and she snatched off her wedding-ring, and tossed it recklessly away.

“ No, I believe you are not,” said Flora, gently, “ but do sit down ; indeed you will make your-

self ill by giving way like this. Astley says you are not really married. I heard him tell your brother so ; that the feigned name made it illegal."

"Why did not Astley save me from this snare?" cried Louisa, forgetting in her own selfish grief how little claim she had on Astley's forbearance, "why did he not warn me? he knew, he must have known days and days ago ; how easily he might have spared me this shame and suffering !"

"And so he would," replied Flora, eagerly, "had it been in his power, but he could not ; he worked with all his might, and never rested, in hopes of getting the necessary proofs ; but was always disappointed. Nobody could have been more sorry for you than he was."

"And now, they will all mock and laugh at me, Mr. Clarke, and Mr. Hamilton, and all. Oh ! why has this come on me ?"

"Indeed, you are unjust to them. I never saw any one more grieved than Mr. Hamilton seemed. Oh ! I am sure nobody would be so

ungenerous as to laugh at you under such a trial !”

“ You know nothing of the world, Flóra, or you would not expect generosity,” said Louisa, impatiently. “ Perhaps those men may not laugh openly ; but they, and every one, will laugh in private, and scorn me for my disappointment. What can I do to escape them ?”

“ Act with dignity and self-respect,” replied Flóra. “ Do not give way to false shame, or ill-founded regret ; and nobody will laugh at real, true, honourable sorrow. Nobody can !”

“ Ill-founded regret !” exclaimed Louisa again, “ is that what you call my disappointment ?”

“ No, indeed, I did not mean that ; I dare say I cannot explain myself right—but what I mean is, that you have a right to be sorry that the man you chose as a husband has behaved ill, and disgraced himself, shown himself wicked and unprincipled—this is a true cause of grief, for which everybody will sympathise with you. But if you were, on the contrary, to care more for your own loss—I mean, for not

being rich, and being disappointed of the advantages which this marriage promised, and to appear vexed for your trouble, more than for his crime—if you were to seem this, I think, perhaps, people, some ill-natured people, might say disagreeable things. Only act honourably and nobly yourself, and you will find everybody will honour as well as pity you. I am sure of it !”

“That’s all very fine talking, Flora ; but I cannot help regretting the fortune ; and I cannot pretend to care about the man. I am sure I hope with all my heart, he will be transported for life. He ought to be punished for deceiving me so. Miserable wretch !”

“You are so unhappy, you do not know what you are saying. By-and-bye, when you are calmer, you will see things in a better and truer light. I am sure I wish I could comfort you.”

“I cannot be comforted. There is no comfort for me. To have lost five thousand a year, when just within my grasp ; to have been deceived, cheated, trapped by a miserable villain ; to be

the jest and laughing-stock of all my acquaintance—oh ! it is bitter—dreadful. What have I done that this should come upon me—*me* ? so many women as I have seen who have made good matches ; and I, when so near, to be again disappointed. What can there be to comfort me here, Flora ?”

“ One thing I think ought to comfort you, as your brother said—you are still among friends. Think how much worse this would have been, had it been discovered hereafter, when you were in America, for instance, away from everybody who cares for you.”

Louisa did not seem to think this would have really made matters worse, so she did not reply. Flora longed to urge also, that she was mistaken in thinking that the fortune she so much regretted, had been so nearly hers. It was one of those delusions which will take hold of a woman’s mind, and never can be eradicated ; and I have no doubt but that Louisa Grant will continue to the end of her days to think that she was very near marry-

ing a man with five thousand a year, instead of admitting the actual fact, that she had really married a swindler with nothing but his crimes for his fortune.

Flora thought that as Astley, and consequently, she herself were so much concerned in the result, it would not sound kind to remind Louisa, that the fortune she regretted could not honestly have been hers. So she listened patiently to her ravings for some time longer, and what she could not answer, she allowed to pass in silence.

At length, Louisa roused herself to enquire what had become of the visitors, the breakfast, and all the other concomitants of this woeful affair. Miss Denys told her the arrangements which had been made; and then Louisa insisted on her going down, and finding out what had occurred, and bringing back her brother.

The general concern, pity, astonishment, and curiosity, when the illness of the bride, and the sudden departure of the bridegroom were announced, may be easily imagined. Every one who did not belong to the house, prepared im-

mediately to take leave ; but, under such circumstances, a long time is required to say last words, listen to hints, whisper surmises, and insinuate suspicions. Miserable and impatient, Norman hurried from one group to another, in the vain hope of expediting their movements. He could do nothing—distress and shame, and anxiety to conceal his feelings overpowered him, and he rushed away. He found the three gentlemen he had left, still together.

“ For pity’s sake, do go and get rid of those people,” cried he. “ Hamilton do try what you can do ; Clarke, pray have compassion on me. What can I say ? I am too miserable to invent excuses.”

He threw himself on the sofa, and his two friends went out to try and do his bidding. Hamilton’s calm and authoritative manner had great influence ; he soon succeeded in persuading one or two parties to take leave, the others followed of course ; whilst Clarke, meanwhile, had contented himself with inducing Mary Carden to take his arm, and, accompanied by her sister,

to retreat with him to the garden, where he promised to explain to them recent events. After this, considering he had done his part, he did not return to the drawing-room, leaving his friend to do the best he could in sending ladies and gentlemen home without the promised breakfast. It was a woeful ending to Louisa Grant's wedding party; and those who were thus deprived of the feast they had anticipated, had as yet little to console them in any other shape, for the real reason of the finale had not yet become public.

When Norman and Astley were left together a short silence followed, which Astley broke by saying, "I am afraid you must rather hate the sight of me, Mr. Grant."

"No, indeed," exclaimed the other, rousing himself from the reverie into which he had fallen, whilst considering who was to pay the confectioner's bills, the bell-ringers, the disappointed post-boys, and all the other innumerable items of vanity and expense. "I fear you have more reason to think ill of us. I need not say,"

he added, with confusion and distress, "how entirely and completely unexpected this catastrophe was. My poor sister has been, believe me, as much the dupe of this villain as you yourself, and, perhaps, almost as great a sufferer."

"More—more, beyond a doubt," cried Astley, earnestly. "I require no assurances; I should be ashamed of myself if I could for one moment doubt her being entirely deceived. I only wish it were in any way in my power to repair the injury, which, under the name of my late relation, has been done her. I shall always consider myself so far to blame in the event, as to be bound in conscience to assist her to a remedy, such as the law will allow her."

"No one can blame you," replied Norman, gravely, "playing for such a stake, secrecy and silence were of course necessary. I suppose this miserable man could have no property of his own."

"I should apprehend not a farthing. What he has wasted of mine, I cannot exactly calcu-

late ; but he has been doing things in a liberal way since he came home."

Both gentlemen were silent for some minutes each thinking of the same thing, and uncertain how to introduce the topic.

"Excuse my mentioning," said Norman, presently ; "but all the expenses which have been incurred on my sister's account, you will allow me to defray. It is as well to come to an understanding at once on this point."

"The very thing I was wishing to speak of," cried Astley. "Whatever he did for Miss Grant under the name of my uncle, (except, of course, the marriage settlements, which go for nothing) but all his presents, and all this paraphernalia of the wedding itself, you must allow me to discharge."

"Impossible !" cried Norman.

"I shall consider it a great favour if you will," replied Astley, with emphasis, "on my uncle's account, in honour of his name, for the sake of Flora's friendship for your sister, in consideration of my own dilatoriness, and to

prove that you have no enmity to me, you really must let me have my own way."

"It is too liberal; he made her such handsome presents."

"Then I trust she will keep them; and such as are not already paid for, she will be kind enough to allow me to settle. Poor thing! I wish a few trinkets or dresses could afford her any comfort. She will not mind doing me this favour, in consideration of our supposed connexion; or, if not for my sake, she will accept them in Flora's name. It shall be our wedding-present to her."

"I thought as much," exclaimed Norman, starting up, and seizing Astley's hand he wrung it with great emotion. "I suspected something of this sort. My dear fellow, now I know your worth, I rejoice that I did not rob you of your best treasure. I would have won Flora's heart myself, if I could; but I did not know whom I was injuring in the attempt."

Astley felt tempted to reply, that he did not think there had been any great danger; then

the remembrance of the vile aspersions which had been thrown on his character came across him, and he longed to ask for some justification.

"Ever since Miss Denys lost and recovered that bunch of trinkets you gave her, I have suspected this," continued Norman. "Her exceeding concern when she missed them, and her joy when they were restored, were unmistakeable evidence of her regard for the donor."

"Ah!" said Astley. "I have heard of that too." He did not say what he had heard.

"I wish you joy, Mr. Boyle, with all my heart, or, with as much of my heart as I have left," he added, laughing a little. "That I could not be a week in the same house without being quite captivated by her, you will readily believe; and that for my presumption, I received a very positive and decided refusal, will give you as little surprise as it did me satisfaction. The only thing I do not understand, is that she denied all engagement, open or private."

"She was quite sincere. We only came to an explanation last Tuesday."

"Tuesday !" repeated Norman, "ah ! that explains it all. And Louisa was right all along when she said Miss Denys was quite free."

"I do not wonder that Miss Grant knew but little of her wishes or inclinations," replied Astley, "here she is coming," and a moment after Flora entered the room.

"Your sister wants to see you, Mr. Grant," said Flora, "how have matters gone on ? have the visitors left ? what have you done ?" looking at Astley as she spoke.

"Here comes Hamilton to report," said Astley. "Well, what has happened ? how have you sped ?"

"The folks are all gone, who have to go," replied Hamilton, "but now, what next ? Is there anything more for me to do ; or may I rest from my labours ? By the way, Clarke seconded me by taking off the two Miss Cardens, and then disappearing entirely !"

"Come up-stairs with me, Mr. Grant," said Flora, "I will take you to your sister ; she is in our room."

"And come back to me, Flora.," whispered Astley. She nodded and smiled, and then led the way.

"I cannot tell you how much I am obliged to you, Miss Denys, for your kindness to poor Louisa," said Norman, as they went up-stairs. "That it proves you the perfect being I always believed you, delights, although it cannot surprise me. I knew your worth."

"If you please, Mr. Grant, let us have done henceforth with all foolish flatteries and nonsense speeches," replied Flora, "put all that by, amongst the remembrances which are never to be brought out again. If we can be rational friends, so be it; but if not, the blame is with you, and the consequence will be that we must cease to be acquaintance."

"I shall look forward with the hope of always numbering you and Mr. Boyle amongst my friends," replied he, gravely, "and not to excite your displeasure, I will try and keep my thoughts to myself. Poor Louisa, how is she?"

"Tolerably composed—here she is."

Flora having brought Norman there, would gladly have escaped herself, but Louisa rather dreaded a *tête-à-tête* with her brother, especially since he had seen Astley, who had so much in his power to reveal ; she would not consequently agree to Flora's leaving her, feeling her presence a sort of safe-guard from awkward questions and explanations. Consequently, Miss Denys, at her urgent request, consented to remain in the room. Louisa then began to cry very much, and for some time seemed too much agitated to speak coherently ; however, after a due administration of cold water, sal-volatile, and other restoratives, she suffered herself to become more composed, and demanded in a weak hysterical voice, what she could do now, and what would become of her.

Her brother had not the least idea ; however, his sister told him, he must take her away, she could not stay another day in this place ; they must set off to-morrow as early as possible. To walk about, and be pointed at as the convict's bride, was out of the question altogether.

Norman very good-naturedly assented. He proposed two or three plans for her choice ; a trip to the Highlands, an excursion up the Rhine, or a visit to Paris. She could not make up her mind at the moment, but her grief was evidently mitigated by the suggestion.

"Tell me for certain, Norman, I am not that man's wife, am I?" said Louisa, earnestly.

"I have no doubt you can get the marriage set aside, on the ground of the assumed name," replied Norman. "It will, I am afraid, be tedious and expensive, but I suppose it must be done."

"Must—of course, it must! Would I ever acknowledge myself the wife of a wretched transported criminal? They do not hang for, forgery now, do they?"

"No, thank Heaven, that is done away with. If he is really the man they suppose, he must have been Mr. Boyle's servant on his passage home. But his manners and information were superior to that; and I do not think he can always have filled so low a position. How un-

fortunate that you should not have suspected him, Louisa !”

“How should I, when Astley Boyle introduced him as his uncle? Who could think of doubting the fact. It is all his doing—his fault, in short.”

“I do not see that,” said Norman, looking at Flora, whose heightened colour he could see, though her face was partly averted; “and although not in the least responsible, he is most generous in his wishes and proposals. I never knew a better fellow.”

He was rewarded by Flora’s smile.

“What has he proposed?” exclaimed Louisa, eagerly; “anything about the settlements, or what?”

“The settlements, of course, are all rubbish, my dear. I see now, why the bankers threw such difficulties in the way of the transfer, and thought it would be so advantageous to wait a few days longer. What he has proposed, is for you to keep all the presents made in his uncle’s name, and he to be allowed to pay for them,

and all the expenses of the marriage, which are not already settled. What do you think of that?"

His eyes asked Flora, although he did not name her.

"Just like Astley," exclaimed Miss Denys, eagerly; "I knew he would be generous. I hope you will let him settle it so. I am sure it will give him pleasure."

Louisa thought of her new dressing-case, and all its expensive fittings, of her lavish expenditure on her wardrobe, the means for providing which had been supplied by her lover; and recollected how impossible it was for her to pay, and how heart-breaking it would be to part with these treasures. She sighed, and asked her brother what she should do.

"It is for you to decide, Louisa," said he. "If you do not mind putting yourself under obligation to him—if you like to accept it, you can; if not, we will arrange some other plan, and I shall be happy to act for you."

"Do not talk about obligations," interposed Flora; "I am sure Astley, and all of us, will

consider we are the obliged parties. Do not be proud, Mr. Grant, and put it in that way. Give him the opportunity of making up, in such a slight degree as that, for the evil which has been done, and all the pain his name will have caused you. You will have reason enough to hate it for ever, even if you do condescend to accept this, I know. I am quite aware that a few trinkets, or shawls, or silks, can never in the least compensate for all you have to undergo. It is for our own sake—I mean for Astley's sake—you should do this, to show you can forgive all he has been obliged to do against you."

"Mr. Boyle hoped you would take it, Louisa, and I could only thank him. He and Miss Denys are certainly of one mind, and use the same arguments," replied Norman, looking with very visible admiration, at Flora's glowing cheek, and energetic manner.

"If it would really gratify Astley," said Louisa, hesitating, and apparently uncertain, "I should be sorry to seem proud, or to act ungraciously.

I would not mind accepting from him what I would not take from another. I wish I could show my gratitude in any way, could do anything for him in return !”

“You can,” exclaimed Flora ; “you must know all about that wretched accusation against him, which his uncle—I mean that person—invented to injure him. Can you not help him to trace it out, and prove it false ? Those letters that man produced, they must have been forgeries. Say you do not believe them.”

Louisa hesitated now very sincerely. Flora was touching on dangerous topics ; the last thing she could wish would be, that her brother should hear anything on this point.

“I dare say it was all false,” said she, colouring crimson. “To a man like that one, a regular forger, it could give no trouble to produce any such fictitious letters. I know nothing, myself, of Miss Jones, or any of his private affairs. I merely repeated what I heard from him.”

Flora looked dissatisfied, and stood pondering in silence.

“Astley will never hear it,” continued Louisa, “so do not distress yourself. And I am sure you may suppose every word of it to be false—I mean which that wretch said. Such a miserable scoundrel.”

In point of fact, it could not perhaps make much difference to Robert Masters, alias Mr. John Boyle’s character, whether Louisa shifted on to him the entire guilt of all the slanders he had circulated about Astley; and she argued with herself that, as it could not injure him, and might materially benefit herself, she was quite justified in the course she took. The more she thought of it, the more convinced she became of this being the right view of the case; and at length she not only brought herself to assert, but entirely to believe, that, throughout the whole of the efforts made to unite Norman and Flora, she had been as completely the innocent dupe of superior cunning, and the victim to involuntary mistakes, as her brother or Miss Denys, and a great deal more to be pitied than either.

This comfortable conviction was not all at once arrived at ; it was the result of repeated assurances, declarations and explanations, which being almost invariably false, ended eventually in deceiving herself, much more than they did any one else, and brought her again on tolerably easy terms with her own conscience.

When the possession of her hitherto rather precarious property had been assured to her, Louisa began to feel herself equal to returning to her own room, and accordingly announced her intention of no longer trespassing on dear Flora's time or apartment. Flora was rather glad of this ; she knew her mother would be wanting to come up-stairs, and she herself was longing to escape for an interview with Astley, whom as yet she had hardly seen. She therefore escorted Louisa to her own room with great satisfaction ; and then, escaping from the brother who appeared more anxious to detain her than she was to stay, she ran off gaily to look for Astley Boyle.

The grand termination of the whole affair

was, that although the bride, after all, had to go without her husband, Hamilton declared there was no reason why the whole household should not have their dinner ; and much to the satisfaction of the hungry, and the consolation of the sad, persuaded Astley to invite them all to come and partake of the very liberal repast which had been provided ; where, in the absence of Norman Grant, his sister and aunt, the company generally agreed in drinking Mr. Boyle's health, and wishing him much enjoyment in the splendid fortune, which it was now pretty generally understood would fall into his hands. Nobody thought much of the death of an unknown individual, so far off as the Cape, and their general regard for Astley Boyle himself, made most of his friends sincerely glad that such an amiable young man should be happy and prosperous.

He, perhaps, was in reality the saddest of the party. The reaction of spirits, naturally resulting from extreme excitement, the fatigue of so many nights spent in travelling, and days

in business, combined with all his overpowering sensations of joy, deep, heartfelt, inexpressible joy, made it an effort to be attentive to the company, and a great sacrifice to remain with them at all.

CHAPTER XI.

Rich is the sky where thou wert born,
And gorgeous are the flowers,
But yet I hope thou wilt not scorn
This cold blue sky of ours.

So may'st thou keep the tropic glow,
And the full joy of life ;
Yet tame thy current to the flow
Of a cheerful English wife.

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

GREAT as were the surprise and consternation prevailing amongst the wedding-guests generally when the catastrophe became known, none seemed so entirely overpowered by the news, as the twin-sisters. When Mr. Clarke whispered to Mary Carden that an accident had occurred, which made it desirable that the guests should quietly disperse, and that all that was now

asked of them was their immediate absence, she and Annie very readily agreed to withdraw, and at once allowed him to escort them out of the room. But that this was an accident which he had foreseen and expected, never entered their innocent heads. There were those in the house who had anticipated that some important event was coming ; Mrs. Newton, Flora herself, had looked forward to Thursday as the turning point in the affairs of Astley, although without any precise idea of what was to take place ; but Mary and Annie were acting in simplicity and good faith, believing all Louisa told them, and looking upon the ceremony in which Miss Carden had taken a part, as a sort of standard for a fashionable English wedding.

When Mr. Clarke unfolded to them the actual state of the case, the effect was very great, although their feelings were somewhat different. Mary, with certain notions of romantic admiration for an ideal character, which she conceived an Englishman to resemble, was terribly shocked to have discovered so much

crime in a native of her Father-land. It was a profound grief to her. Certainly, theoretically speaking, she knew there were criminals in England, as in other countries; she had heard of trials, and convicts, and penal settlements, and prisons, and naturally concluded that the existence of these, proved the existence of crime; but she had never imagined such unhappy facts would be forced on her own sight, or that amongst those who had formed part of her own circle, she should be brought in contact with any one so sadly disgraced. Her notions of English gentlemen were rather exalted, she had hoped to find them a compound of honour, tenderness, courage, and integrity, and mentally supplied these qualifications from the abundance of her good feelings, in her estimate of the characters around her. To have her fancies thus rudely destroyed, and to find that before she had been six months in England, she had actually seen, spoken to, eaten with, a man suspected of dishonesty, fraud, and forgery, was a severe blow to her favourite notions, and made her

tremble for the entire perfection of the British character. She could fully appreciate the fact that this individual had been in their society, but not of it; but still she argued, where was the security of rank, or station, or education, where were the impassible barriers, supposed to hedge in each domestic circle in England, and make home sacred, safe, and quiet, if such a man could thrust himself into a family, and be received by them? The distinctions of rank and education were far more easily dispensed with than she had supposed, or this impostor would have shown he was not moving in his proper sphere. In this case society was imperfect, and therefore unsafe, and she had hoped it would be otherwise, and was grieved and disappointed accordingly. In addition to these sentiments, there was a large admixture of pity for the culprit, who, from a wretched love of gold, and a desire to be rich, had been led to commit so much crime, and occasion so much distress.

What must be his feeling now? How vainly

must he look back to the time when he was young and innocent, and happy ; how he must sigh over the past, and dread the future.

It did not strike Annie in the same light. When the fact was explained to her, she opened wide her black eyes, and gave Mr. Clarke a sort of shuddering look, such as seemed to say, "Thank heaven, what an escape I too have had," as if she imagined he would equally prove an impostor ; and that no Englishman could henceforth be trusted.

He interpreted the expression directly, and saw with something very far removed from satisfaction, that the result was by no means favourable to his suit. Up to this moment he had not been particularly distressed at the villany which he had assisted in tracing out ; he had not considered the actions of the impostor as in any way connected with himself ; a low scoundrel, who had only just education enough to save himself from egregious blunders ; what could there be in common between them ; he had looked on, as he might have done at the

cunning of an inferior animal, and certainly neither grieved nor blushed for the crime he was exposing. He combatted Mary's distress, by dwelling strongly on the difference of classes ; it was not a gentleman, either by birth or education, it was a vulgar adventurer who had been detected in dishonesty, and he felt that the wide interval which separated the culprit from himself, Edward Clarke, effectually prevented even the shadow of the crime from dimming the border of his own garment.

Great was the astonishment of the proud English gentleman, when he discovered that the lady of his love, looked on them both as fellow men ; considered the disgrace as affecting not merely the low class to which Robert Masters might be supposed to belong, but every countryman of his, who became acquainted with the crime, and included all Englishmen in the suspicion and doubt to which this unfortunate circumstance gave rise

“What could there be,” he inquired, “in common between such a wretch and himself.

Did Miss Carden really suppose that because *he* had been detected in fraud, no Englishman was to be trusted? or could she for one moment imagine that such a trifle as living three weeks in contact with a man devoid of principle, could contaminate others, men of birth, education, and good character? The barriers with which custom fences each separate caste, make it impossible for a higher class to be injured in character by the crimes of those who stand beneath them in the world."

"I think little of your classes and your castes," replied Annie; "they are purely artificial distinctions, not recognized by philosophy, good feeling, or religion. A man is a man, in spite of the accidental circumstance of birth. The distinction between nations I can comprehend; an American, an Englishman, a Spaniard, these are all wide and evident divisions. But beyond those, arbitrary differences are invisible in my eyes; and if you cannot see that every Englishman who hears the tale should blush for this miserable criminal, I can only say I do not

comprehend either your nationality, or your sense of honour."

Mr. Clarke bit his lip.

"You see," continued Annie, with energy, "Louisa Grant has been the unfortunate victim of this very delusion in which you English grow up, with regard to the distinction of classes. She found this man in the same rank in society as herself; she believed, as you seem to do, that the barriers of custom are impervious to interlopers. On this trust she received his addresses, and through this trust she has been miserably deceived. In a land where no such grades of society are recognized, she would naturally have been more alive to her danger. Where no exclusive circles are formed, men and women must stand by their own merit; here, each member of the circle is a guarantee for those who walk beside him; and the disgrace of one reflects discredit on all."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Carden," replied he, with some warmth; "but I must observe that the fellow who has been carried off by the

police to-day, did not, in my opinion, belong to *my* circle; at all events, I am no guarantee for his conduct."

"Then you and I moved in different and unconnected circles," said Annie coolly; "for of that into which I have been introduced, the man bearing the name of Boyle certainly was a member. If you are so far elevated on the icy eminence of English aristocracy, as to be quite lifted above all human sympathies, able to contemplate with easy contempt, and amused indifference, the unfortunate and miserable crimes of those whose sphere is lower, although their nature is the same as your own, I can only say it is a situation, and an exaltation which I do not envy you. One which I am thankful my own birth and fortune excuse me from ascending."

Mary started at the tone and manner in which her sister spoke, and looked anxiously from her to him. Mr. Clarke reddened, bowed, hesitated, and then replying in a voice of suppressed emotion, which, however, nearly got the

better of him, in spite of his efforts to seem calm: "Thank you, I believe I understand you," he turned and walked away with haste, leaving the two sisters on the gravel path which they had been slowly pacing during this discussion. Mary's eyes seemed to reproach, or question her sister. Annie drew herself up proudly.

"Let him go," said she, "the cold, proud, unfeeling Englishman, dressed in the stiff panoply of castes, and grades, and circles, and classes. Let him console himself by the reflection that the woman who has rejected him, has not the honour of moving in the same circle as himself; and that her indifference arises from *her* want of perception, not *his* of merit."

"And this is your deliberate determination, Annie," enquired Mary, with some difficulty restraining the tears which sprung to her eyes, "not the result of pique, or hasty feelings?"

"What guarantee have I," continued Annie, without listening to her sister, "that he is any better than this man whom he so proudly disdains. What proof have I that he, or any

one, or every one around us, is not an impostor. Mary, English society is hollow, false, rotten through and through :—oh ! that we were escaped from this weary isle, and once more in the land of freedom. Oh ! Mary Mary, take me away !”

She ran in doors, and fell into a fit of bitter and passionate tears, but whether she cried for the crimes of Robert Masters, or the hard-heartedness of Mr. Clarke, or her own hastiness was not quite apparent, although if time could have revealed the source of her tears, it would have discovered itself, for it was long before they ceased.

Hamilton was taking a calm philosophic walk in the afternoon of that day, when he encountered, to his no small astonishment, at a considerable distance from home, his friend Clarke, who with hasty step and hat drawn over his eyes, would certainly have passed him without notice, if Hamilton had not placed himself across his path, and compelled him to halt. He then looked up.

"Ha ! Hamilton, is that you. I did not expect to meet you here !"

"Nor I you, Clarke ; on this day dedicated to the felicities of matrimony and love-making, I thought you would have been following Astley Boyle's example, and devoting yourself to the *beaux yeux* of Miss Carden !"

Clarke was silent, and they walked on to a stile, over which Hamilton sprang.

"You are coming on with me, Clarke ?" said he.

"No, I shall go another way."

"Very well, I will go with you, that will do as well !"

"What for."

"Because from your *air farouche*, and unamiable manner, I grievously suspect you stand in need of my company, and are too modest to ask for it."

No answer was returned for some time ; then Hamilton added,

"Come do not hesitate—is it sympathy, advice, or warning that you need. Have you conj-

gated the verb in the past, or future tense. I spoke, or I shall speak, which is it ?”

“ We did speak,” replied Clarke, “ and to some purpose too, and the result is, she is there, and I am here !”

Then, still leaning over the stile, he described as well as he could, his quarrel with Annie, its cause and result, ending with an appeal to his friend’s judgment.

“ I think Miss Carden was perfectly right,” said Hamilton quietly, “ perhaps not in her ideas, but her feelings. Her theories regarding England and America are crude and wild enough ; womanly, highly womanly, and as such, she may entertain them without much harm at present ; time, acquaintance with life, and experience will clear up her half-formed views, and give her truth as well as warmth. But, Clarke, her notions of your levity do her honour. It is your way too much to laugh at the wrong, and to see it rather in an absurd, than a serious light.”

“ I do not mean it. I hate what is mean and base, even if I do laugh.”

“Ay! but don’t you see that is not her meaning. She does not accuse you of loving vice, but of despising your inferiors. In your own rank, perhaps, crime would shock you; but in one beneath you, you do treat it as if it were merely a joke, in a what-do-I-care-for-it style. You do not mean to be unfeeling; but you certainly appear so.”

“Do I? Well, I know it is a very serious thing to commit crimes, and all that; but one cannot be always acting the weeping philosopher.”

“One need not be always talking on serious and solemn subjects; but I suppose when one does, one may treat them seriously. After all, it concerns Robert Masters, if he is a culprit, every bit as much as it would you, were you in similar circumstances.”

“Not quite! We should not start even. I should have more to lose.”

“In temporal things, yes! But when we consider the real nature of crime, its effects and consequences, as connected with the grand ultimate result, who can take into consideration the

idle, scanty differences of worldly position. When a man," continued Hamilton, breaking off leaves from the hedge as he spoke, "when a man is about to plunge down a precipice of unfathomable depth, I suppose it does not make much difference whether he stood a foot or two higher, or lower at first."

"Well, I am wrong; I have been wrong, I admit. I have often thought it myself. I knew Annie was right at the time, and I wish I had said so. Hamilton, you cannot tell what it will be to me to lose her. I am sure I do not know what I shall do—go on a pilgrimage, I think. If she will not have me, I do not care a bit what becomes of me. I shall do something desperate, I believe."

"You will do no such thing; you have a great deal too much sense. What right has a man not to care for anything, because one woman will not marry him? We are not sent into this world to marry this woman or that, but to do our duty, to be useful to our families and our fellow-creatures—not to make ourselves, but other people happy, Because the cocks crow,

and wake you to the recollection of business don't wring their necks, but get up and do it."

"What a practical, matter-of-fact, unromantic fellow you are, Hamilton; however, I believe you do practice what you preach, and that is something. I wonder what Annie expects of me."

"To benefit by her reproof, and not be above mending your conduct. If you could manage to avoid the appearance of levity and heartlessness, perhaps—"

"What?"

"Why you might get credit for steadiness and good-feeling."

"Pshaw—well, I don't know, perhaps you are right; she is not the only woman in the world, and maybe another may think differently."

"Oh! if you merely want a wife," replied Hamilton scornfully, "I daresay you will have no difficulty. The lady who was married this morning, when she is emancipated from her present bonds, will perhaps be happy to honour you with her hand."

"I shall go back, and tell Annie I am very sorry," replied Clarke, "promise to amend if she will point out my errors, and learn to be good if she will teach me. If you had seen how grand she looked, and how gloriously her eyes flashed when she was taking me to task in that way, you would understand how little I can bear to lose her."

"I have always told you how much I wished you might succeed, Clarke. I do not think you could do better than marry her, if she will have you. If you give her up, I have some thoughts of trying to win her myself."

Annie Carden made a wonderful discovery that afternoon; she found out how very much she preferred Mr. Clarke to any individual, real or imaginary, whom she had ever bestowed two thoughts upon. The conviction that she had sent him away for ever, that her hasty and contemptuous speech had entirely separated them, and that he never could, or would forgive her censure, shewed her at once what a blank his absence would occasion.

Her vague and somewhat ideal admiration for Astley Boyle, which had been the result of the first admission of favourable thoughts of an Englishman now seemed to be like a dream. The pleasant and softened feelings which a conquered prejudice leaves behind, had led her to believe that it was a strong individual preference she had learnt to entertain for him ; whereas it was simply the natural reaction of a generous temper, convicted of injustice ; the prejudice against his country gave way in his favour, but it was Mr. Clarke who taught her how important, how even essential to her happiness one individual of that nation might prove himself !

His late absence, although tedious and unpleasant, had been supported in the hope of his ultimate return ; and their removal to Torquay, to which they were now looking forward as likely soon to take place, had been always connected in her mind with continued intercourse with him. He had promised to follow her there, and then—she never tried to lift the veil

from that *then*, satisfied with the vague outline she could discern under its folds.

Now it was different. She had harshly driven him away ; she had made no allowance for old familiar prejudice ; for early bringing up ; for national peculiarities ; for superior education ; for manly scorn of crime ; for his juster appreciation of society and the claims of rank. With the obstinate self-will of rash ignorance, she had condemned his opinions, blamed his conduct, and declared her own contempt for his principles. Of course, he could never forgive, or think well of her again ; he must now see that she was a silly and inconsistent girl, assuming the airs, and pretending to the opinions of a woman of sense, and he would certainly be as much inclined to leave her on his own account, as he would be induced to suppose from her language she wished him to do.

With this conviction on her mind, she determined to shut herself up in her own room, and on no account to go into society again, whilst she remained in the house.

In pursuance of this plan, she refused to go up stairs that evening, and consequently when the wandering and penitent lover returned from his ramble, and sought anxiously amongst the group assembled in the drawing-room for his offended lady, he only saw her sister, and his resolution immediately to endeavour to make up their differences was perforce postponed a little longer. He did what he could, however, for he came directly to Mary, and enquired, somewhat abruptly of her, but in an under voice, "Where's your sister?"

"She would not come up this evening," replied Mary, colouring and looking enquiringly at him, as he stood by her. He drew a chair up close, and leaning over a paper which was lying on the table, he said in a low voice, but without turning his eyes on her,

"Is she very angry, Mary, dare I speak again?"

Mary smiled faintly, and repeated, "Dare!" but he could not quite decide whether it was intended interrogatively, or as a command.

"I am perfectly convinced that her reproof was just," pursued he, "and I hope to be the better for it, all my life. If she would let me show her this, I might perhaps succeed in convincing her, how dearly I prize her good opinion. If, however, I have no chance of forgiveness, if she considers me really too proud, and cold, and selfishly engrossed, to be worth attempting to amend, if she gives me up entirely, Mary, tell her that whilst I own she is just in her appreciation of my faults, I hope she undervalues my resolution to improve."

"Tell her yourself; you must, you ought; if you really feel all you say—indeed you must plead your own cause with her!" said Mary eagerly.

"Only procure me the opportunity; but when or where can I see her!"

"Oh! it will come, be patient and hopeful."

And so it did, for a whim seized Mary, the next day, to take a donkey excursion up the Beacon side, and of course Annie had to accompany her: Mary was, moreover, treacherous

enough to give Mr. Clarke a hint of her intentions, and he managed, in some wonderful way, to fall in with them upon the road, a little above the village street. Annie looked mightily inclined to run away when he approached, and was too much confused to raise her eyes as he took off his hat to them. She did not know whom he was speaking to, when he asked leave to walk with them, but as Mary answered, she supposed he had looked towards her.

It was not by Mary's side that he placed himself, however, during the walk ; she was surprised to find him close to herself, and speaking in the same grave low voice she had once heard from him before.

"Miss Carden, if you would listen to me for one moment, if I have not forfeited all claim !"

She turned her head a very little towards him, just enough to indicate attention.

"I have to thank you, I hope I shall *for ever* have to thank you, for your just and most deserved reproof—but can you believe in my wish of amendment ; that once convinced of

levity and selfishness, I would willingly conquer them?"

"Please don't Mr. Clarke," said Annie blushing more deeply every moment, but not intending to reply to his assertions, "you must not talk so to me. I have no right to condemn, it was perhaps forward—presumptuous—spoken in petulance!—forgive and forget it."

"Forget it, never! for I trust to be the better hence forward for the remembrance of it. Forgive!—there is nothing for me to forgive! Miss Carden, may I believe you do not quite renounce me?"

"Yes—no—" murmured Annie, not quite sure which she ought to say.

"May I hope by time, perseverance, intense affection myself—tell me—may I *hope* now?"

This time she did not say no.

"Annie, dearest, can you believe an Englishman, after what you have heard and seen?"

"I believe *you* entirely, Mr. Clarke," said she, fairly raising her eyes to his.

"And will you trust me too?"

"Perfectly."

"How far—with this hand?" drawing her right hand under his arm, and holding it there rather closely. She made no attempt to release it.

"And for life?"

"For life," was her reply in a scarcely audible whisper.

They walked on some yards in profound silence, but it was a silence they mutually understood.

"I may tell Mary that you promise to be my wife," said he at length; "that she shall be our sister, and our home hers?"

"Dear Mary, she will be very glad," was Annie's answer.

"You have told me you believe and trust me," said he, "say one other word, tell me you *love* me, Annie!"

"When I thought yesterday afternoon you were gone away for ever, I first found out that I had any regard for you, Mr. Clarke. I never knew I cared for you before!"

"That is not what I asked you to say,

Annie! and though very pleasant, not what I wanted to hear."

"Patience," replied she smiling, "I have told you enough for one morning. At Torquay, perhaps, I may tell you more. Now go and lift Mary off her donkey, she is beckoning to you."

He did so, and Mary's joy at the announcement, completed the happiness of the little party on their descent from the Hill.

Mr. Hamilton was not long left in ignorance of his friend's success, and he behaved with his accustomed magnanimity on the occasion. He declared he foresaw the entire destruction of their long friendship; he knew that married women generally disliked their husband's friends, and made their houses uncomfortable to them. However if Clarke was contented, he could be resigned; and whatever his own feelings might be, at finding himself excluded from the delightful fireside of his friend, he was determined to bear him no ill will, and would drink to his health in the Malvern Waters, on his wedding day.

Annie, who really believed him serious, protested against the notion that women could be so short-sighted and meanly jealous, but Mr. Clarke laughingly agreed to it all, and advised his friend to follow his example, and retaliate this anticipated injury on some other miserable bachelor.

But Mr. Hamilton turned a deaf ear to his proposal, nor was there anything in his manner, either in his calm *insouciance*, or laughing, good humoured raillery, which promised in the slightest degree to justify the predictions, or verify the guesses of those, who had imagined him seriously captivated by the charms and qualifications of Mrs. Woodbridge.

CHAPTER XII.

Out upon it ! I have loved
Three whole days together ;
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fine weather.
Time shall melt away his wings,
Ere he shall discover
In the whole wide world beside
Such a constant lover !

SUCKLING.

THE Grants left Malvern early on Friday morning ; Louisa's chief anxiety being to escape entirely from all condoling friends, in whose every word of pity she fancied a sneer of contempt. After her departure, the particulars of her misfortune became generally known, for Mrs. Hunter could talk of nothing else, and considered it her duty, in justice to herself, to make known the

whole story, that every one might see how entirely clear she was from blame, as aunt and chaperon.

Everybody immediately agreed in expressing all the dislike, suspicion, and wonder they had always felt on the subject of the supposed Mr. Boyle's appearance and manner. It was extremely fortunate that these opinions had hitherto been so carefully concealed, for had half the mistrust of him, which now appeared to have existed, been openly declared, the stranger would certainly have absconded long ago.

It was necessary that Astley should speedily return to London, and as he seemed unwilling to leave Flora, it was rather suddenly concluded between the party, that their visit at Malvern should also terminate. Whether Mrs. Denys had really derived all the benefit her daughter chose to expect from the waters, was a question which never received a solution; she was easily persuaded to try a change, and as the season was not pleasant for returning to London, they

resolved to go to the sea-side for the autumn months. It was with real and sincere regret that Flora took leave of some of her late friends and companions, and with most earnest arguments and entreaties, to be sure to come and see her, whenever the occasion offered itself.

The cordial intercourse of so many weeks, the interests they had shared, and the pursuits they had enjoyed together, had given her a kind and sisterly feeling for them, which made her unwilling to acknowledge that any difficulties could interfere to prevent future meetings, or that in spite of the changes and chances of life, there was any probability that this would be their last parting. She was young and sanguine, ready to believe what she preferred, and hope what she wished.

They removed to the south of England, where a railroad gave Astley easy access to them, whilst the arrangement of the business in which he was now involved, obliged him to be much in London.

There was no difficulty in the identification

and conviction of the unfortunate man who had played so bold a game to be rich, tempted alike by opportunity and want. No legal quibble, no technical difficulty was allowed to interpose in his favour, to save him from the punishment of his crimes, or show how carefully the law may be made to protect the guilty, and leave the innocent to suffer.

When the message had been conveyed to him, as he alighted from his carriage, which requested an immediate interview in another room, he had with the ready consciousness of guilt, instantly suspected that all was lost. The shock did not come on him entirely by surprise; he had already taken the alarm, and even the day before had been more than once on the very verge of having recourse to flight, and endeavouring to secure his own safety, though he forfeited all else.

With the strange unaccountable infatuation which blinds criminals until they rush into destruction, he yet lingered, and had contented himself with peremptory letters to his bankers, desiring that no delay, not absolutely unavoid-

able, should be allowed to interpose before fulfilling his directions. He even, in a fit of desperation, sent up to his agents bills of exchange Mr. Boyle had been bringing home, and which he had hitherto retained in his own possession, desiring that they might be immediately negotiated, and the money transmitted to Liverpool. Half hoping that it might be some one come to speak to him on money-matters, he had gone to meet his fate in another room. There stood an officer of police, whose looks he little liked.

"Well, my friend," said he in bravado, "what is the matter. Be quick, please, with your business, I am in a hurry."

"As quick as possible, Sir: you, I, believe are the gentleman known as Mr. Boyle."

"Known as Mr. Boyle, what do you mean. I am myself, Sir," replied he, inwardly trembling, and outwardly blustering fiercely.

"That is exactly what I came here to enquire about," replied the officer calmly, "I have some business with you, look here!" exhibiting his

warrant as he spoke. Mr. Boyle turned colour, growing yellow with fear.

"This is a mistake, my good friend," exclaimed he. "There's another Mr. Boyle here; I am not the right person at all. Wait one moment, and I will call him."

"I am afraid, Sir, this will not quite do," said the officer, laying one strong hand on him, and with the other opening the door into another room, "Mr. Astley Boyle be so good as to identify this individual, as the man calling himself your uncle, but supposed actually to be Robert Masters, and designated in this warrant."

Astley came forward, and hastily exclaimed it was all right.

At the same moment, by a dexterous movement, the officer removed the grey wig which had hitherto greatly concealed his features, and showed a short but strong growth of coal black hair.

"It is no use to contend against fate or police officers," said he, "you had better come quietly and quickly, before the affair gets wind. Your portmanteaux are all conveniently packed, we

will have them down in a trice ; and Mr. Boyle, be so good as to call my companion from the porch ; we will slip out the back way, when we have put this good gentleman on a great coat, or something to hide his wedding-suit, and will whip him off as quiet as a baby. Don't trouble to put on your wig again, my friend ; best go without it, and I'll lay my life not a soul will suspect who you are."

And so it had come to pass that before any of the party missed him, the bridegroom was on his way to London, with policemen instead of his bride for company, with the unpleasant anticipation of a change in his destination, and a voyage to Sydney, instead of his trip to America.

After this Robert Masters gave up all for lost, and at the first opportunity made a full confession to Astley of all the circumstances which had conspired to induce him to commit this offence.

He had been educated as a lawyer's clerk, had emigrated on speculation, been unsuccessful, and when reduced to extreme penury, had been glad

to engage as domestic servant to Mr. Boyle, for the sake of obtaining his passage home.

When his employer was taken ill, Robert Masters speculating on a chance of a legacy, had devoted himself to his service, with a zeal which had well deserved a reward. Mr. Boyle had felt this, and bequeathed to him a handsome legacy, in a codicil added to a will he had made just before his voyage home. This will, however, Robert Masters owned he had subsequently destroyed, when the plan of obtaining the whole property first entered his head.

This idea presented itself, even before his master was buried, as he looked over the various papers, and formed a distinct notion of what was the actual wealth of the deceased. The voyage home afforded him ample leisure for perfecting himself in all necessary details ; by practice and perseverance he had succeeded in acquiring the power of writing so correct a copy of Mr. Boyle's hand, that it was difficult to detect any difference ; and his memory was sufficiently good to prevent his falling into any mistakes as to

family affairs, which might be very easy of detection.

At first he had intended merely to remain for a day or two in England, and having obtained possession of a few thousands, to decamp before a suspicion should arise. The ease with which he had imposed on Mr. Denys and Astley, and the very large property which seemed so nearly within his grasp had tempted him on to venture farther; and when Miss Grant made it evident that she was ready to receive his advances, he could not resist this additional chance of happiness. He calculated that the influence of her family, should he be suspected, would perhaps be useful to him, in shielding him from consequences; besides it gave reason for originating a quarrel with Astley, by which means he hoped to get rid of his company, and avoid the supervision he feared might lead to detection; and were he eventually compelled to remain in America, he thought it would be pleasanter to have a companion in exile.

All this he owned without any scruple to

Astley, during an interview which he obtained before his trial; he had no ill will towards him, he said; he had always found him a very dutiful nephew, and had he really been his uncle, he thought he should have liked him very much. As it was, he was very glad that Astley should be happy, since he had not had the luck to be successful himself; of course he would have preferred getting off with the money, but since that was not to be, he heartily congratulated the rightful owner on its possession, and he trusted as little as possible would find its way into the pockets of those legal gentlemen, who were no doubt hoping to make a good thing of his trial. His revelations, and the knowledge he possessed of Mr. Boyle's affairs were of great use to Astley; and the will which the bankers had in their care, being in all except the legacy to Robert Masters, a copy of the one destroyed on the voyage, put him in quiet possession of his uncle's property, so soon as the proper proofs of his death could be procured from Cape Town.

Robert Masters entertained no ill will against

Astley Boyle ; no, he reserved that for his wife, against whom his anger and malevolence were so extreme as almost to amount to insanity.

Mortified and disappointed in the highest degree by finding that all his claims on her were denied, and his appeals to her and her family were treated with contemptuous silence, he set no bounds to his resolute determination to be revenged on her. Her mercenary motives should be exposed ; her treachery towards Flora and Astley, as well as her brother, should be published : all the world should understand the baseness of her conduct.

It appeared strange and unaccountable to all those who knew them both, that he should have been duped by her pretended regard and affection, and should even for a moment have believed her attachment sincere. But so it was. Louisa was a good actress, and he had the consciousness of his real age and abilities to help on the deception.

Whilst others saw him only as the silent and taciturn man of sixty, he *felt* himself a very different being, and fancied that the love which

he seemed to have inspired, was at least, in some degree, genuine.

His revenge now consisted in betraying to Astley, how far all the plots against his character, and the attempts to entrap Flora into an engagement with Norman, were the invention and work of his wife. He hoped that by showing how deeply she had injured him, he should deter Astley from, in any way, assisting her, either by advice, or kindness of a more substantial form. He longed to tell the same to her brother also, rightly judging that such a revelation would be the most effectual punishment to Louisa herself; but Norman kept out of his way, and Masters never could ascertain whether his letters reached him or not.

It was a great satisfaction to Astley to have the full explanation which was thus afforded him, and to be able entirely to clear himself from all the suspicions which had been thrown on his character. Not that Flora required such explanations—she had given him her full and entire confidence, with her promise, and from that mo-

ment had even forgotten her doubts. But it was very sweet to him to be able to show that this confidence was not undeserved, and to convince Mrs. Denys that in trusting Flora's happiness to him, she was committing no rash and imprudent act. Louisa never even knew how completely her treachery had been unveiled; on the contrary, the persevering kindness with which Astley assisted her in the tedious and expensive business of getting her marriage set aside in Doctors' Commons, induced her to believe that he threw the whole blame of the past on the convict, who was meanwhile on his way once more to Australia. Her mind was incapable of comprehending his higher motives; she had never learnt to return good for evil as a duty, and could not understand the satisfaction which arises from a consciousness that we have obliged those who have injured us, and forced those to esteem us, who had before shown contempt or ill will.

If any one thinks Astley was romantically generous, and unnecessarily forgiving on this

occasion, he is perfectly welcome to his opinion ; but I shall still keep mine, and boldly aver that my hero has never been known to regret any part of his treatment of Miss Grant, except the simple fact, that he did not arrive an hour earlier at Malvern, on that important morning.

The mortifications which pursued Miss Grant in consequence of her unfortunate attempt at matrimony were sufficiently acute, although Astley did so much to alleviate them. Every one of her relations, except her brother, turned against her, and it was long before the sight of a letter brought her anything but annoyance and shame. Those whose congratulations had been warmest and most flattering now employed the most insulting expressions of pity, the most contemptuous exclamations of wonder, and the most useless good advice for the future. How she could ever have ventured to trust to the word of an acquaintance, picked up at a watering-place ; how she could have been so deceived as to imagine a poor lawyer's clerk to be a gentleman ; how she could have made up her mind to marry

a man of no birth, education, or fortune, were questions asked again and again, which no explanation would make intelligible, and no effort of hers make less surprising.

Norman was truly kind and good-natured, and his affection for her was so sincere, however little deserved, that he never troubled himself to believe more of her misdoings than was absolutely inevitable ; putting down much of the truth which really reached him, to the falsehood and vindictive feelings of the angry culprit who sent him the information.

The brother and sister went abroad for some weeks, but business compelling Norman to return to England, he very good-naturedly took a small cottage at Richmond, where Louisa resolved to remain *perdue* until the trial was over, and her marriage also was declared an empty form.

She was really as grateful to Astley Boyle, as it was possible for one of her selfish nature to be ; and such was her complaisance and power of pleasing, when she earnestly attempted it, that

she made herself extremely agreeable to Mrs. Denys ; who, with Flora's consent, invited her to come and stay with herself, during the time that Astley and his bride intended to spend partly in travelling, and partly in visiting her property in the north, and deciding where their future residence should be.

Whether any thing more than a superficial amendment had been effected in her character, it would not be easy to say ; but Astley always continued to hope for the best, and to treat her with that conciliatory kindness, and generous trust, which was far more likely to bring the best about, than harsh reproaches, and scornful, contemptuous neglect could ever have been.

With Norman, he established a permanent friendship, which was not interrupted by any unhappy remains of attachment on the barrister's part for Astley's bride. On the contrary, the rejected lover was speedily and effectually cured of his week's passion, by an introduction to the very Miss Jones who, with her £90,000, had so innocently caused such distress of mind to

Flora Denys. The actual introduction he owed to Astley Boyle himself, but the idea, I am obliged to confess, originated in the fertile brain of Louisa, who saw plainly the advantage it would be to her, if her brother were settled in London as a married man.

Happily Miss Jones lent a more favourable ear to the addresses of the handsome young lawyer than Miss Denys had done ; and such was his good speed, and good fortune, that the same week which witnessed the union of Astley and Flora, was that in which Miss Jones also became Mrs. Norman Grant. My own conviction is, that this great success was in no small degree owing to the lesson he had received from Flora, and that her refusal of him, having inspired him with some diffidence, and some anxiety as to the result, materially aided in giving that last touch to his manners, which rendered him irresistible to the young lady who accepted him.

Annie Carden has of course been for some years the happy wife of Mr. Clarke, and I do not believe has ever since expressed any dislike to

England, or mistrust of Englishmen. Certainly they have resided very quietly, and to all appearance comfortably, on his property, in one of the Midland Counties, nor has she been heard to utter a single regret that oaks and beeches are not palms, or silk cotton-trees; that roses are not daturas; strawberries not bananas, or that Warwickshire is not either Cuba or Trinidad.

I am very much afraid that Mr. Hamilton is still a bachelor, and continues to lead an unsettled and solitary life; at least, I have never heard of his marriage, but having for some time lost sight of him altogether, it may possibly have taken place without my knowledge. Should this be the case, I beg he will let me know it, that I may not be backward in presenting my congratulations on so agreeable an event.

Of one thing, I am quite sure, that Flora and Annie always retained as agreeable a recollection of Malvern, as Louisa did the reverse; and whilst the latter shunned the subject, as connected with shame, contempt, and reproach, with ill-natured sarcasms from the relatives, and unkind reflec-

tions from the friends, whose congratulations on her marriage had been loudest and warmest, the former never met without pleasant reminiscences of their first acquaintance, and were ready to receive with most cordial regard, all those who had shared in their amusements, or sympathised in their sorrows, during their residence at Great Malvern.

THE END.

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